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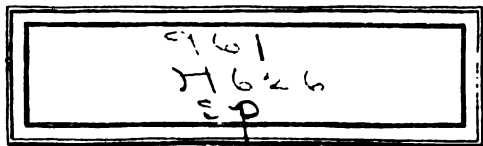
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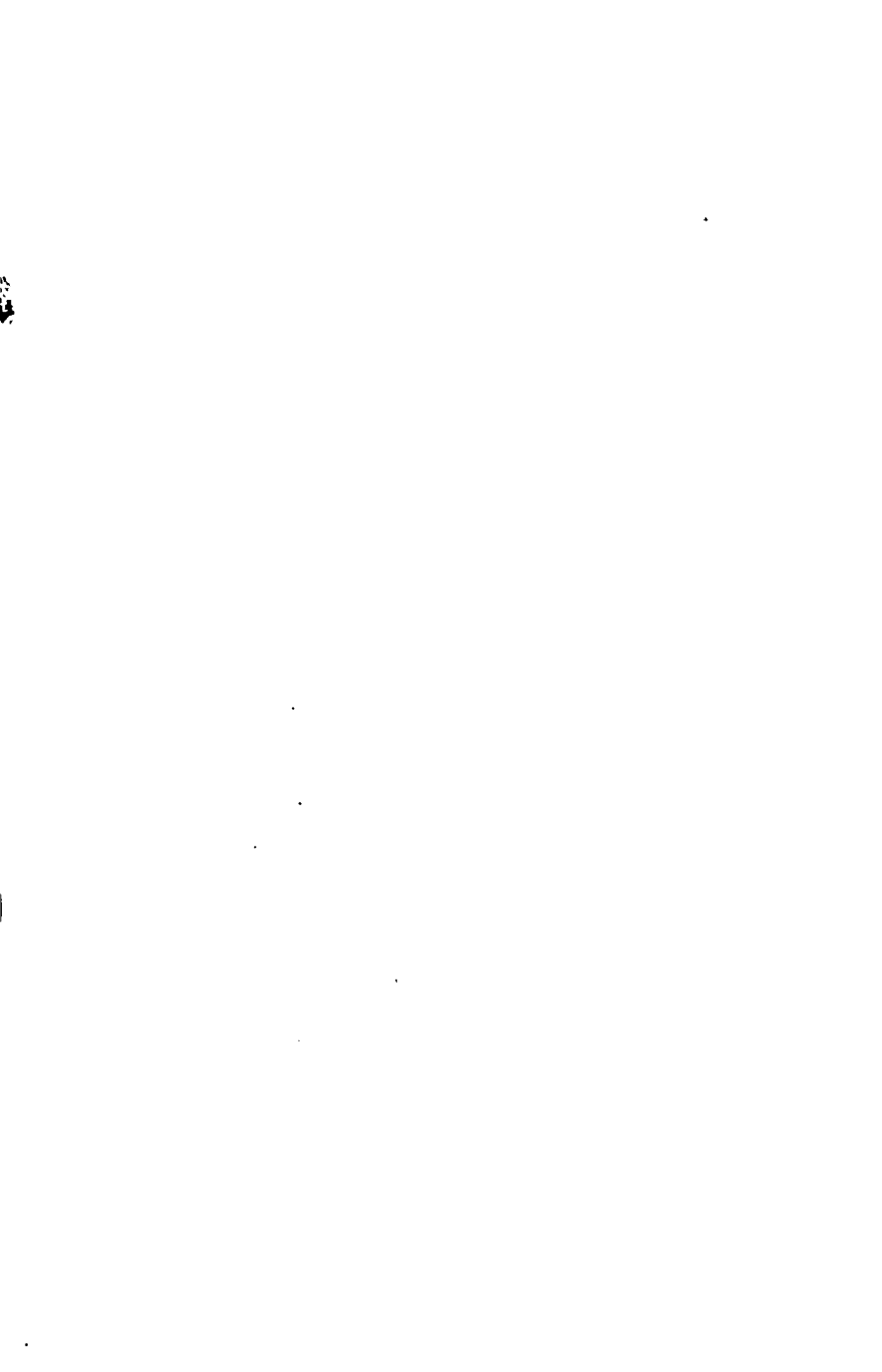
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THE SPIRIT OF THE TIME

By the same Author

SNAKE-BITE

MRS. MARDEN

The Spirit of the Time

By
ROBERT HICHENS



CASSELL AND COMPANY, LTD
London, New York, Toronto and Melbourne

TO THE
AMERICAN

First published 1921

THE SPIRIT OF THE TIME

CHAPTER I

IN the autumn of 1919 Derrick Merton, although he prided himself on being a man of will and possessing a sense of humour, felt that he really couldn't "stand things" much longer. Like thousands of other people he was suffering from reaction after the long nightmare of war. Although he had been too old—alas, he was over fifty—for active service he had spent a great part of the last five years in doing things which were hardly in his "line," because he had considered it his duty to do them. He had served for four years with the Special Constables, had been a helper in an East End hospital for wounded soldiers, had done a lot of dull clerical work for a public department, and, for a few months, had driven a motor lorry in order that a man might be released for the army. Twenty-

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seven air raids had fallen to his lot. He had formerly been accustomed to spend a considerable part of each year in travelling abroad and had not left England once since the War had broken out. And now he had a bad cold in the head which he could not shake off. Even repeated and almost desperate inhalations of Friar's Balsam did him no good, and his sneezes were loud and portentous in the land of his fathers. On the top of all this came the great railway strike and a loud call for volunteers to do all sorts of extremely unattractive things. It was really too much! And life seemed almost unbearable to Derrick as he sat sneezing beside a small fire—there was very little coal to be had just then—in his flat in Cork Street, London, and wondering whether he ought to go off and offer his services as an amateur porter at one of the big stations—Waterloo perhaps!

He decided to ask a doctor. For he felt really very unwell, quite weak in body and mind. Both seemed to be saying, "We've done and borne enough and more than enough. If you demand anything more of us we shall go on strike, like everyone else."

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The doctor came, and after an examination forbade Derrick to undertake any more work.

"You're quite at the end of your tether," he said. "Go abroad. Have a long rest. I'll write you out a certificate and you'll have no difficulty about getting a passport. There's functional disturbance of the heart. It's not serious, but you mustn't play with it. Unless you follow my advice you're in for a complete nervous breakdown."

"Very well ; I'll go," said Derrick.

"Better take someone with you."

"No, thank you. To tell the truth I long to get away from everybody, to see only new faces which won't recognize me. I'm aching for a little bit of complete personal freedom."

"Where will you go ?"

"I'll go—abroad !" exclaimed Derrick, drawing a long breath. "That covers everything !"

The doctor smiled and wrote out the certificate.

Not many days later Derrick was in a crowded train starting from Boulogne for Paris. From Paris he meant to go to Montreux. He was almost fiercely fond of the

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sun, but just now the snows attracted him. After all the weariness of war he longed to look on the vast white solitudes, to see the peaks in the blue, to hear the shuffle of the snow dropping from the branches of pine trees, to let his eyes wander along the glories of the autumn woods on the lower slopes of the hills which guard Lake Lemman. And he longed, too, to be in a country which had not been in the War. So he resolved to travel to Switzerland.

Paris was a nightmare, a phantasmagoria of hurrying people who looked morbid or mad, and who seemed unhinged by war and longing for dreadful repayments. Derrick stayed there two nights and hated it. To him it seemed like a city of vultures.


“If this is what war makes of human beings,” he thought, as he sat outside the Café de la Paix observing the frantic crowds, “God help humanity!”

The ugliness of the expressions on most of the faces almost terrified him. He drank a cup of chocolate and was charged three francs fifty by the waiter, who looked indignant when he received half a franc as a tip

for bringing the cup. Derrick had given it to him merely to see how it would be received.

“Vultures! Vultures!” he said to himself, as he left the café. “The War has turned men and women into birds of prey.”

In the evening he went to a theatre and saw a farce full of stale indecencies at which a crowd of men and women of various nationalities laughed convulsively. On the following day he escaped—that was his feeling—from Paris. He was now on his way to a country which had been immune from the horrors, though not from many of the annoyances, of war. Already he felt a sense of relief. His mind travelled on, leaving the train behind, on to the mountain peaks, the snow-fields, the glaciers, the climbing forests, the ravines musical with rivers, on to people who had not had the hideous duty of killing laid upon them. He lay back in his seat by the big window watching the landscape come up and vanish, with its villages, its fields, its mysteries of shadow and light, its winding white roads with the little mysterious travellers upon them whom he would never know, and something of the old glory of the pre-



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War life seemed to swim over him and to possess him. Once more he felt the thrill of a voyager's freedom at his heart, the anticipation of the haphazard, the unexpected, the sense of adventure which turns back the nature towards boyhood.

To travel again after five years ! To be sitting in a big express on foreign soil, rushing towards a frontier and away from all the duties of the immediate past ! It was jolly indeed. The schoolboy's adjective fitted it. Derrick fingered his passport almost with an absurd sensuality. Then he took it out and looked at the photograph of himself pasted on it.

He saw a man who looked about fifty, with a broad forehead, grey hair inclined to be curly, and wide open, rather anxious, brown eyes. The photographer had given him a sort of pinched smirk which distorted slightly a firm, rather humorous mouth, above which was a close-clipped wiry moustache. An energetic chin gave a certain look of power to the face without destroying its sensitiveness.

"And that is I !" thought Derrick. "I've aged a lot since the War. My hair looks infernally grey. The photographer has given

me a disgustingly middle class smile, like a Clapham tea-party, but he's abolished most of my lines. Can there be much ahead for that man, that still unmarried man?"

Suddenly the thought came upon him that he had passed irrevocably the happy age of adventure which travelling suits so well. Little flutters are easily forgiven to youth, but when one has grey hair, a definite pucker between the eyebrows, and wrinkles—not due really to the habit of smiling—spraying out beneath the corners of the eyes, one must aim at the undesired dignities which are supposed to dress up suitably the man who has passed his prime. Derrick felt as if he heard the shutting of doors as he returned the passport to its leathern case. During the War, without being aware of it, he had taken a leap from the age of still possible adventure to the age of — what? What was there really left for such a man as he was? What could the freedom of travel give to him? The licence to drift through hotels, to sit solitary in restaurants gazing at the enjoyment of others, of lovers, young husbands and wives, parents and children, to wander by lake

shores or on mountain-sides, staring at the beauties of nature which in their wonder awaken hungers not to be appeased by them, to greet starry nights alone with no fear of disturbance, but with no hope of affection's caresses. Freedom! Derrick had kept his, and now he was going to pay for it.

An abrupt and intense feeling of gloom overspread him. For a moment he almost wished he had not left England. There, at any rate, he was surrounded by friends, by people who had known him so long that they accepted him just as he was without either surprise or criticism. Where he was going he would probably merely be glanced at with the indifference evoked by middle age, or perhaps wondered about, or even coolly pitied as a derelict, grey-haired creature of the drifting type that haunts foreign hotels, and may be seen lounging vaguely in smoking-rooms, or pretending to read a book while sitting over a solitary dinner in the midst of talkative parties.

Decidedly the War had played the devil with Derrick's nervous system, turning him to a pitiable morbidity. He had still the common sense to know he was morbid, but that know-

ledge did not help him much. His gloom persisted and even increased, till he came to the ridiculous conclusion that a middle-aged bachelor has no place in the scheme of things, that nobody wants him, that he exists merely on sufferance and has no right to look for any real happiness. By the time the train glided into the station of Montreux he felt like a pariah, and he got out of his carriage with a sort of dreadful humility which seemed pleading with Switzerland to put up with him in spite of his obvious unworthiness.

In Montreux he stayed at the Hotel Monney, and had a room with a terrace facing the lake.

It was grey weather that day. Clouds hung on the mountain-sides, hiding the snows. The autumn woods covered the lower slopes with a clinging beauty of red, russet-brown, brilliant yellow, old gold, pale pink and ash colour. The waters of the lake were still. A few fishermen were out in small boats bending over their lines.

Derrick unpacked, had a bath, changed his clothes and went down to *déjeuner*, which he ate in the small restaurant just before the great dining-room. The train had arrived

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late. He found himself alone in the restaurant. When he had finished his meal he went into the reading-room, picked up a local paper and carried it into the smoking-room. No one was there. He lit a cigar, sat down, opened the paper, and began to look at the list of visitors in the many hotels and *pensions* of Montreux. The porter had told him that Montreux was not very full, but the paper seemed to give the fellow the lie. Derrick read columns of names, whose owners were at this moment established in Montreux. German and Russian princesses, Polish counts, Turkish pashas, beys, Ukrainian barons, Bulgarians, Rumanians, Austrians, Serbians, Montenegrins, Armenians, Georgians, Czecho - Slovaks, Italians, Circassians, announced themselves to the world as staying on the shores of the lake. Never before had Derrick read so many names which he would have found it impossible to pronounce correctly. Having nothing to do he read the whole list right through from beginning to end.

“I must go cut presently and see some of these people!” he thought. “After five years of England it ought to be amusing.”

He laid the paper down.

As he did so two ladies came into the long room from the hall. One of them was tall, with jet black hair, black eyes, a curiously square face and irregular features. She was decidedly a plain, almost an ugly woman, but had an air of intellect and marked distinction. She was very simply but very well dressed, and wore a three-cornered black hat and white kid gloves. Round her neck hung several ropes of pearls. Her companion, who was much younger, was fair, small, with blue eyes and silky brown hair. The two women did not sit down, but stood together near the end of the room in earnest conversation. Presently the elder woman opened a little bag which hung at her waist, drew from it a case and took out of it a cigarette and a long cigarette holder. With a certain delicate precision, which was evidently characteristic of her, she put the cigarette into the holder and looked round for a match. She pointed to a table at a little distance, and her companion went towards it, but evidently found no matches, for she shrugged her sloping shoulders and made a *moue* and a gesture of disappointment.

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At this point Derrick got up, walked down the room, made a non-committal sort of bow, and said in French :

“ May I give you a match, madame ? ”

“ You are too good, monsieur,” said the elder of the two ladies in French. “ Unless I can smoke I am very unhappy.”

Derrick lit a match. She bent forward, with the holder between her lips, and he lit her cigarette.

As he did this the lady's large black eyes met his for an instant, and it seemed to him that her mind was in close contact with his, that it said to his mind something like this :

“ So ! It is at Montreux that you and I had to meet ! I could not go to England to you, and so you have come to Switzerland to me ! ”

So strong was his sensation that she was silently speaking to him that he actually opened his lips to make some—he didn't know what—reply. But he was, as it were, interrupted by the lady, who said, with a slight smile of half melancholy politeness :

“ Thank you, monsieur, you are too kind.”

A moment later he was back in his place at the other end of the room.

CHAPTER II

THAT afternoon Derrick put on his hat and coat and went out for a walk. It was exceptionally cold that day, and he distinctly felt the breath of snow in the air. Looking up towards the mountains behind the small town he saw the great hotel at Caux above Territet vaguely defined through the tattered skirts of the clouds. White patches lay around it and just below it. To-morrow he would go up there and walk in the snow. There was a great tent pitched on the *place* near the lake. Little boys were gathered about it, and an orchestra was playing loudly a march from "Aida." Derrick read the announcement of a circus. Perhaps he would visit it that night. It would be something to do. He walked on and passed many smart shops. A good many people were about, walking slowly and well wrapped up, evidently taking their "constitutionals." He looked at them, trying to guess to what nations they belonged.

One enormously fat man, with a great white face, shining dark eyes, and big carefully waxed moustaches, was probably an Armenian. He looked as if he had just been powdered, like a baby, and thoroughly manicured. A wrinkled old woman went by, carefully tinted the colour of magenta. She carried a gold-headed cane, and was accompanied by a griffon. What was she? Perhaps an Ukrainian or a Czecho-Slovak. Some Germans were promenading. They looked quite serene, even comfortable, not at all like people who had just lost a war. No doubt they were thankful to be safely out of their own country. Derrick turned and went back, walking now in the direction of Vevey.

He passed his hotel and went on towards the Montreux Palace Hotel. When he reached the Arcade he saw in front of him the two ladies of the Monney Hotel. The elder one was wrapped up in furs. She had a very distinctive walk. Even the way in which she moved suggested authority and high breeding. What nation did she belong to? Derrick thought she might be a Hungarian. That she was an aristocrat he was quite certain.

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Her companion, he thought, might be German.

At the end of the Arcade the two ladies paused. Thin snow was beginning to fall. They turned and met him in the Arcade. As he passed them he took off his hat, and they both bowed slightly.

The pearls round the neck of the elder woman were hidden by the fur coat she wore.

Derrick wondered why he had thought of them.

That evening, just before dinner, he had a talk with the director of the hotel, an intelligent and agreeable man who knew Montreux like his pocket. The director gave Derrick a brief history of the social conditions in Montreux at the moment.

"They are quite abnormal, monsieur," he said. "Many of the people here are refugees. We have Russian aristocrats who are utterly ruined living in the best hotels, Turks who have escaped from their decaying country, Germans and Austrians who would as soon be in hell as in Berlin, which is a playground for bandits, or starving Vienna. (For make no mistake, monsieur, Vienna is literally

starving.) We have here"—he lowered his voice cautiously—"spies whose occupation is lucrative no longer, but who still hope to find something shady to do. There are princesses here without a halfpenny. You know the condition of the exchange and what the German mark and the Austrian krone are worth. As for the Russian rouble!" He threw up his hands. "You may meet in the street any day diplomatists who haven't the money to pay for a new pair of trousers, Muscovites who own large tracts of land in Russia and who now are little better than the beggars at Italian street corners. (In Montreux, of course, there are no beggars.) The Greeks here are all fanatical adherents of ex-King Constantine, and have followed him into exile. Most of them, perhaps all, would give thanks to God if they heard that a knife had found its way by chance into the body of Monsieur Venezelos. Then we have Armenians who probably are only alive at this moment because they are beyond Turkish territory. You may see them eating pastries, twenty, thirty at a time, side by side with the Turks in our tea-rooms. We have, of course—thank

Heaven for it—a few war profiteers here. They help to keep the shopkeepers going, gamble at the Casino, and put some money into our poor pockets by drinking champagne in the hotels. But never has Montreux been like this before. If one could only get right under the surface here, *mon Dieu*, what tragedies would be revealed ! Imagine people of the greatest families living in our hotels—which I think I may say are the best in Europe—without two halfpennies—of their own, *bien entendu*—to rub together and without any hope of having two halfpennies of their own in future time. What a position ! ”

“ Well, but how on earth can they live in hotels ? ”

“ Ah, *monsieur*, how can they ? How do they ? I know the world pretty well, but it is often a puzzle to me how half the world lives. How do these people who are ruined by the War live as they do here ? How do they pay for chocolate and cakes in the tea-shops, for concert tickets at the Casino ? *Tenez !* There is a concert to-night, *Madame Litvinne*, a great artiste. If you go there you will see them, the living mysteries, who live

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without having the means to live, as one might say. Between the parts of the concert they will risk something—which they haven't got, so to speak—at the tables. Of course, the limit here is ridiculous, as you know. But even five francs is five francs, n'est ce pas ? ”

“ But surely they must have money ? ”

“ Monsieur, they get it—somehow. They sell things. You can buy jewels in Montreux cheap, very cheap. And if you can carry them to London there is a nice profit for you. And they sell—other things.” He looked very expressive. “ Ah, the world ! And some, with very great names, are taken into the hotels very cheap, for next to nothing. They are *réclame*, you understand, for the hotels. And then——”

But at this point of his discourse a secretary hurried up, and the director, with a “ Pardon, m'sieu ! Au revoir ! ” turned away.

Derrick moved to go in to dinner. He had decided to live *en pension*, so he dined in the big room at a fixed hour, a quarter past seven.

When he had found his table he saw sit-

ting close to him the two ladies, who were already drinking their soup. They were smartly dressed and wore hats. He wondered whether they were going to the concert that night. They were surely not dressed like that for the circus. He made up his mind to go to the concert. It might be interesting to see the living mysteries. The elder lady, who was opposite to him, wore the pearls. As he glanced at them he thought of the director's remark about jewels. Could she be—— But he put the idea from him. He simply could not imagine a woman of her type as a pauper. She looked as if all the good things, the really distinguished things that make life a song instead of a street cry, must be hers by right. Some things are so unsuitable that they just cannot happen. Such women cannot be allowed to be poor.

As he thought this he saw the big black eyes looking at him, and again he felt that their owner's mind was somehow in direct communication with his. An agreeable thrill went through him. He was emancipated from his morbidity of the train.

“After all, perhaps I am not too old,” he

said to himself. "She seems to feel some interest in me."

And he remembered that there are women who like grey hair on the head of a man, and that there are other women in the world besides flappers. For the middle-aged man who is attracted by flappers there is literally no hope on this earth. But Derrick honestly thought flappers bores, and liked women of the world.

How old was she? Forty, probably; perhaps even more. But he was positive she was a very interesting and very clever woman. Even her ugliness—it almost amounted to that—attracted him. He was sure that she did not mind it, never had minded it. She was too aristocratic to be cast down by a trifle of that kind. No doubt she had read history, memoirs—he could see her reading memoirs—and remembered the Princess Metternich, and many other ugly women who had ruled society with the rods of wit and of will.

The two ladies finished dinner before Derrick and left the dining-room. As they went out they bowed to several of the people at

the other tables, and Derrick noticed that their salutes were returned with a smiling eagerness by the women and with marked deference by the men.

"I must find out who they are," he said to himself.

After dinner he hoped to see them about, but he was disappointed. He smoked a cigar, put on his coat and hat and started off on foot to the Casino.

By the tent door the orchestra was blaring, and people were pouring in to see the sensational feats of the famous Knie family. For a moment Derrick hesitated. He was fond of a good circus. The sawdust and the horizontal bars appealed to something boyish which still lingered in the depths of his nature. But she would certainly not be there. He walked on and found his way to the Casino.

The big powdered baby with the moustaches entered it just in front of him, showing a marvellous coloured waistcoat with diamond buttons. In the hall were living mysteries of all nations. He bought a stall for the concert which was just going to begin. Madame Litvinne had already arrived from

the Palace Hotel with her accompanist. When he found his seat he saw that the two people he was in search of—for really hadn't it come to that?—were sitting exactly in front of him. He could hear them talking from his seat. They were speaking in—for a moment he feared it was German, the forbidden language—but no, it was something else. Polish, perhaps, or Russian? Finally he made up his mind it was Russian. For there was something soft and liquid about it, a fluidity, a gliding roundness which he associated with Russian. This pleased him, for Russia, whatever she was now, had been an ally. And these ladies could certainly not be Bolsheviks. They did not notice him. They were deep in conversation. The elder lady spoke much more than her younger companion, quickly, with a certain soft violence, as if she were feeling something intensely, but had not forgotten that she was in a public place. Meanwhile the room filled up quickly.

Baby stood up expansively in the front row, showing the waistcoat and diamonds, bowing and smiling to friends in the audience. He looked like one whose soul was made of

the very best pastry, and who would eventually soar on sticky wings to a chocolate heaven. Derrick felt sure he was enormously rich and probably generous, for his very definite wiles were gladly responded to by many enigmas in the audience, by strange wrinkled old ladies, by younger women rosy with paint, or dead white, like clowns, with scarlet lips, by dark, doubtful-looking young men, and by people of uncertain age and both sexes, who had the curious cosmopolitan look which marks wandering beings who live for ever in big hotels, and whom one can never think of as at home. He was still bowing and smiling and waving his manicured hands when the great Litvinne walked slowly on to the platform, with her calm and ample grace, followed by a clever-looking dark girl who sat down at the piano.

The two women in front of Derrick stopped talking, and, after a rustle from the audience and a corpulent volte-face by Baby, the concert began.

When the first part was over almost everybody in the room got up. There was to be a long interval in order that people might have time for a "flutter" at the tables.

Derrick went out at once with the crowd and made his way to the "Boule." He did not mean to play, but to smoke a cigarette and watch.

Only one table was in use that evening, and people eagerly gathered round it, and began to place small sums on the different numbers while the ball was set in motion. Derrick sat down by the other table and looked across the "Boule" at the players and those who stood behind them. There was not the intent and arid solemnity here which he had always been struck by at Monte Carlo. The maximum at the Casino was only five francs. Nevertheless, as the director of the Monney had said, five francs is five francs. When he had seen two or three people lose their money Derrick began to realize more fully the inner truth of that observation. Some of the players were no doubt among the ruined who made their home at Montreux. Their faces seemed to show it as their small stakes were indifferently swept away by the sulky-looking croupier.

The fat Armenian—if he were an Armenian, as Derrick believed—staked and won five times in succession. His large powdered face

was wreathed with smiles. A brick-red Englishman near him cast a look of contempt at his joy and shoved two francs on to "Impair."

At this moment Derrick was aware of someone standing behind him. He looked quickly round, and saw the fair, silky-haired woman of the Monney. She was alone, and was looking at the ball, which had just been thrown in, with a coldly critical expression on her face.

"Sept!" Derrick presently heard her say, as if to herself. "Sept!"

The ball rolled into "cinq," rolled out, seemed to hesitate, like one considering which of two courses to take, and finally came to rest in number seven.

"So!" said the voice behind Derrick.

And the fair woman passed on, mingled with the crowd round the opposite table, and, with a very definite obstinacy, which suggested a ruthless nature, forced her way into the front and began to play.

"She is surely a German!" thought Derrick.

She was young and pretty, but he did not like her face very much. The cheekbones

were high and almost too pink, he thought ; the large blue eyes were steady and cold as electric light. The expression on her face was acutely dissatisfied. She staked the maximum on seven, and four came up. Then she staked on four and seven came up. She pressed her lips together and staked again on four, and lost. Then she changed to eight, and the ball chose to stop on two. Her face now began to show an almost fierce obstinacy, and she cast a look of hatred at the ball as it was again thrown in. This time she did not play, and eight was the winning number. Thereupon, with a sort of almost fierce resolution, she put the maximum on eight, and nine came up.

Derrick had often watched gamblers playing for large sums at Monte Carlo and elsewhere, but he had never before felt so acutely the exasperation which the vagaries of chance can rouse in the human mind.

And yet he had not been playing, and he felt—he did not know why—almost hostile to the woman he had been watching.

A bell rang. In a moment the tables were deserted. He followed the fair-haired woman

back to the concert-room. Her companion was just returning to her seat from the other side of the room, and as the two met Derrick heard her say in French : " I found Litvinne. What a charming woman ! "

The other replied with a torrent of Russian. (By this time Derrick felt sure it was Russian.) She gesticulated as she talked. Her friend listened, looking at her with a sort of stern intentness, the black eyes steady, the long lips pressed together and lifted, drawing up the chin. Then she moved her head several times, giving a strong impression of fatalistic resignation, somehow combined with irony. Finally she interrupted the torrent of speech with an Italian word which Derrick had very often heard cried out in Roman theatres.

" Basta ! Basta ! " she said.

And she struck her breast with both hands twice, drawing down her black eyebrows. The other broke off in a long murmur as Litvinne returned to the platform and was welcomed with a discreet applause.

In the second part of the concert she sang, among many other things, Fauré's well-known " Les Roses d'Ispahan," with its faint and

creeping nostalgia, its delicate and almost vaporous sentimentality, which suggests a lingering perfume hanging in warm air at the twilight hour. Directly this song was over the black-haired lady slowly turned her head and looked for an instant at Derrick. He realized at once that she had known since the beginning of the concert that he was sitting behind her, although she had certainly never looked at him before. He returned her glance steadily, and, while he did so, he felt positive that something of Asia dwelt in her, that Europe and Asia mingled in her as they do in so many Russians. She would surely be at home among the roses of Persia with a volume of Hafiz in her hands. She gave him no sign of recognition. There was something Eastern in the unwinking impersonal stare of her long eyes. Her companion spoke to her, and she moved slowly, but Derrick felt as if her eyes were still fixed upon him, even when he could see them no longer.

“That woman intends to know me,” he said to himself. “Why?”

He did not know, but he knew that he wanted to talk to her, to find out something

about her. She was not, perhaps, wholly sympathetic to him, but she interested him immensely. And she had roused him out of his morbid mood and given him a nice little niche in his own estimation.

“She’s a remarkable woman,” he said to himself, with conviction.

Although he had a sense of humour, he forgot to ask himself whether he would have thought her remarkable if she had shown no interest in him.

CHAPTER III

ON the following day it was exceptionally cold for the time of year in Montreux, the snow was dense on the mountain-side as far as Glion, and Derrick decided to carry out his intention of the previous day and to go up into the white world above Caux. The train on the mountain railway started before eleven, but he felt active and impatient to be off, and resolved to walk up, and perhaps come down by train. So he put on a pair of strong boots, took a stick with an iron point, and set off about half-past nine.

He had slept well; the brisk pure air invigorated him, and he felt more of the joy of living than he had felt for a long time. As he walked on, leaving the houses below him, and turning now and then, as the road wound upwards, to look out over the lake, blue to-day in the sunshine, and the panorama of mountains that gathered about the entrance to the Simplon, he tasted fully his present

freedom. As a special constable he had had to pace Grosvenor Square for hours at a time, between the Italian and American Embassies. The monotony of it had sometimes driven him almost to desperation. But now he could be glad of that duty left behind in the past. It gave a sharp edge to the zest he felt in his present situation. He was free at last ! And he revelled in his freedom and even in his solitude of the moment. His cheeks glowed. He drew in the air from the snows he was nearing. As he mounted steadily he felt the snow like a friend waiting for him up there on the heights. The clouds drew away. The great hotel at Caux stood out clear beneath the blue. Soon he set his feet in the snow and struck the tip of his stick on a film of ice.

After passing through Glion he was deep in the radiant winter. Some boys were joyously tobogganing down the road. As they passed him swiftly, shooting at the stranger glances of pride, their cries rang out in the still air, and died away in the distance. Soon he was quite alone in the snow-covered woods. The silence of which he had dreamed in London was his possession. It was heavy

walking now, but he ploughed his way upward with steady energy, meeting no one on the road. Evidently he was the only person in all Montreux who had imagination enough to care for this beautiful world. There were no cake-shops here. That no doubt accounted for humanity's absence. But the remembrance of cake-shops made him suddenly realize that he was getting infernally hungry. The big hotel at Caux was shut. The concierge at the Monney had told him so. Suppose that no restaurant were open? He couldn't help smiling ironically as he realized that he and the Armenian were, after all, brothers when it came to a question of food.

He reached Caux at last, and made straight for the little hotel which stands to the left of the road. There was not a soul about, but the door yielded to his touch, and he passed into an empty hall. Beyond was a restaurant, also quite empty. There was no central heating on, and the bare rooms were cold, but he saw white cloths on some tables and hope leaped up in him. He knocked hard with his stick on the wooden floor, and in a moment a woman appeared looking rather surprised.

In answer to his question she told him that there was no meat in the house but ham. But he could have ham, eggs *sur le plat*, potatoes, cheese and a bottle of wine if he would wait a little.

“Have it ready in half an hour, madame !” he said. “Meanwhile I’ll stroll up above the hotel, and see what it looks like for ski-ing. Nobody here ?”

“No, m’sieu. But one or two may come in. The morning train goes no farther than Glion, but there’s a train down from here in the afternoon. And now and then people get out at Glion, walk up here, take the déjeuner and catch the train back. On a day like this we often get someone.”

“Ah ! In half an hour, then ?”

“Bien, m’sieu. It shall be ready.”

Derrick left her and was soon once more alone in the snow.

He turned to the left, passed a chalet with a yard in which two rosy-cheeked men were unloading wood, and walked on till he was quite alone, out of sight of all habitations. Before him stretched the vast snowfields glittering in the sun ; above him were the moun-

tain tops. Behind him were the snow-covered trees, standing thickly together, bearing their burdens in breathless silence. He stood still for a long while, and something of the tranquillity of winter seemed to be in his soul. Far down below him lay Montreux with its strange population; the war profiteers, the *réclame* princesses, the pastry-loving Turks and Armenians, the old ladies painted magenta, the enigmatic girls with white, but not snow-white, faces, the ruined diplomatists, the pathetic, yet ridiculous, gamblers. And here were the mountains, the forests, the snows and the silence; here was nature remote, terrifically remote from man and his follies, holding herself aloof as if with a conscious and superb disdain. To Derrick just then it seemed as if there were something profoundly spiritual in nature, which, if only man could reach out to it, would purify him, purge him for ever of his crimes and his ignorance, show him how he might walk intimately with God.

But how to reach out to it? That was the problem.

Behind Derrick a load of snow slipped from the branch of a fir tree and fell into the forest

depth with a muffled and very personal sound. He waited a moment more. He knew he would never forget that moment. Five years of war had been necessary to make it just what it was to him, intense, strange, almost cruelly beautiful. The moment took its place in the past. He swung round and strode back to the inn.

When he got there, and had left his hat and stick—he kept on his overcoat—in the hall, he saw that the restaurant was no longer empty. At a table by the window a lady in a long fur coat was sitting with her back to him. He could not see her face, but he knew at once who it was. A ring of cigarette smoke rose and evaporated in the air above her table.

“Unless I can smoke I am very unhappy.”

So—this was how they had to make each other's acquaintance, up in the snows!

Derrick had made up his mind what to do. He felt for his card-case, found it and drew out a card. The lady had not looked round. He walked up to her table.

“Madame, forgive me——”

The lady looked up without any surprise.

"May I venture to give you my name, as we are at the same hotel at Montreux, and have already spoken to each other?"

"Merci, monsieur."

She took the card and read his name. Then she said in English, but with a very strong foreign accent:

"I am one of the treacherous Russians whom you English despise, no doubt. I am Princess Aranensky."

"Many of us pity, rather than condemn, Russia. We know what thousands of Russians have suffered."

"Russia is a cold hell," she said. "Torture, rape, robbery, murder, in darkness, rain, mist, snow. But I have not seen Russia for eight years or more. As Turgenev did, I live abroad, and so, perhaps, cannot claim to be what is called a good Russian. Ah, here are my eggs!"

At this moment the woman of the house came in with the Princess's *déjeuner*. As she arranged it on the table she said to Derrick:

"I will bring yours immediately, monsieur."

"There is room for it here—if you like," said the Princess in a casual way to Derrick. "We are the only two. Why should we not eat together? We are both of us too old to be conventional. My bottle of wine?"

"I have not forgotten it, madame."

The woman hurried away. Derrick sat down opposite to the Princess.

"You walked up all the way from Glion?" he said.

"That is nothing. I often do it. In Montreux I feel squeezed. But I have been there all through the War. Imagine—that street, the Casino, the tea-shops, the old ladies, the consumptive man who plays the zither, for more than five years!"

"Then I suppose that now the frontiers are open——"

"That makes no difference to me. I cannot leave Montreux. I am too poor. Ah, here is your food and our two bottles of wine! This air makes one hungry, doesn't it?"

She was eating with delicate energy and obvious enjoyment. Now she poured out a glass of white wine.

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"I like its pale colour," she said. "Wine is the blood of a country. For myself I say 'à bas les Pussyfoots!'"

"What—you read our papers?"

"Of course. I read everything. What else have I to do? For the last five years I have been reading, studying, forgetting Montreux and its cake-shops in my sitting-room at the Eden, the Montreux Palace, the Lorius, and now the Monney. Reading is the one pleasure of paupers like me."

"And smoking?"

"And smoking. I come up here to think about what I have read, and to get away from humanity, which at Montreux is une scabreuse comédie. We are all riff-raff there, not by birth, perhaps—that is an accident—but because of the way we live and the effect of war upon us. We haven't fought, though some of us have intrigued, we haven't stuck to our countries in their adversity. We have just sat in hotels and hated the War, and worried about the exchange, and got poorer and poorer, and cursed and gone to the tea-shops, and gambled with five-franc pieces. Moral riff-raff—that is what we are. And so

I come up into the snows now and then ! It makes me no better, perhaps. But it pleases me. Being alone with cushions—one furnishes a hotel sitting-room with cushions, if one is a woman—is loneliness ; being alone with Nature is solitude. The difference is vast. I even forget my empty pockets up here and the deplorable effect that being ruined has upon the immortal soul—at any rate, if it is Russian.”

She smiled, and again Derrick noticed the irony of her long lips.

They talked all through the meal, while they sipped their coffee afterwards, while they smoked cigarettes innumerable. Princess Aranensky asked Derrick no questions, but continued to speak with amazing unreserve about herself, life, men, books. When he talked she listened to him with a still and complete interest. She had no coquetry. She displayed no feminine wiles. There was no hint of sensuality in her manner or atmosphere. Yet there was something warm and strong in her personality. The time flew till the woman of the house came in with the two bills, which she gave to Derrick. He was

about to settle both when the Princess stretched out her hand.

"That is mine—thank you," she said, with quiet decision. And she took it and paid, and gave the woman five francs for herself. Then she looked at her watch.

"Are you coming down by train?"

"Yes," said Derrick.

"Then let us go together. We have half an hour to walk in the snow before the train starts."

It was colder now. The winter day was declining and clouds were stealing down the mountain-sides. The breath went from their lips like smoke.

"Another winter in Montreux!" said the Princess.

Derrick looked at her long sable coat, thought of the five-franc tip she had just given to the waitress at the hotel, and wondered how poor she really was.

"If I were free," she continued, "I should go to Egypt or to India."

"Have you ever been in Asia?" he asked.

"Never. But I often feel Asia within me. Why didn't I go there when I was rich?"

What fools rich people are ! I was. Petrograd, Moscow, Paris, Vienna, the south of France—that sufficed me when I had money. But I only existed then. I did not think. Let us stand here for a moment in the snow. Look at the clouds swallowing up the woods and me and you.”

The mists were indeed floating about them, and the world was fading away, leaving them in a strange isolation. Not a sound was to be heard when their feet ceased from moving. The Princess compressed her lips and half shut her eyes. Neither she nor Derrick moved or spoke for two or three minutes.

“It is true what Steiner says,” she remarked at last, breaking the silence. “All the world which we see is but a mask. The truth, the real physiognomy, is hidden behind it, behind the mountains, and the seas, the desert sands, the sunsets, the moonlight, as we are hidden behind our words, our actions, our laughter and our tears. Even Nature, as we see it, is camouflage. We take for a grey wave of the sea what is really a ship, with perhaps guns trained upon us. Poor little people ! Come, let us go down, or

we shall miss the train, and then Katya will be frightened for me."

"The lady I saw last night playing at the Casino?" Derrick ventured to say.

"Did you? Yes, she hoped to win something. We need money so badly. But she lost. She always loses because she needs to win. That is fatal in gambling—to need to win. She is from the Baltic Provinces and has only been here a short time. She has seen dreadful things in Russia, and believes no longer in a God or in any human goodness. In each man and woman, she says, a hyena is hidden, or a wolf. She has seen the wolf come out many times, poor child! She is hard as ice, but she has some affection for me. Ah, here is the train—well warmed, I hope."

That evening in the hotel Derrick was introduced to the Princess's friend, Baroness Hausen.

She made upon him a peculiar and disagreeable impression, which would, perhaps, have been even more disagreeable had not the Princess that afternoon hinted at her history, explained her to some extent. She was certainly good looking, especially at night, when

artificial light gave a sort of glow to her fairness. She was evidently highly educated and very intelligent, and of course she was polite and, in a detached way, agreeable. But somehow—Derrick could hardly have said how—a glacial cynicism made itself felt in her, seemed at times to emanate from her. All warm sentiment was evidently dead in her, if indeed it had ever existed there. Princess Aranensky had spoken of her friend's affection, and probably she had some feeling for the Princess, but, if so, there was no faith in it, no restful trust in it, no hope mingled with it. She was quiet but not gentle. It was impossible to imagine that she had ever felt happy, yet she made no parade of misery. As to any demand for sympathy, Derrick would as easily have expected it from an ice-covered rock as from Baroness Hausen. She was like a well-bred cultivated human being whose humanity had dried up at the sources, leaving her without regret for it. Possibly she no longer even remembered that it had ever been. She looked at people as one might look at stones in a quarry. The mere expression in her large blue eyes was sufficient to prevent even the

most passing allusion to sentiment, heart, or Christian charity, by anyone the least sensitive to human influences. Disbelief, irony, gleamed in them like the light on a spear point.

She spoke without reserve, like the Princess, and evidently expressed her real opinions in casual conversation, disdaining to hide them. If she did not agree with something which was said she stated the fact bluntly. When the War was alluded to she sneered at the suggestion that any of the nations which had been engaged in it had been moved by any feeling except crude egoism and undiluted selfishness.

"We still live in the jungle," she said, "and we always shall live there. War has simply uncovered our nakedness and shown us as we really are. I wonder why governments take the trouble to lie and pretend any longer. No one is deceived any more by their childish pretences. No one is hoodwinked. So why waste time on humbug? There is one thing, at any rate, to be said for the Bolsheviki. They have no more humbug about them than a tiger has."

Princess Aranensky neither attempted to combat her friend's opinions nor seemed concerned as to what Derrick thought of them. But she did not say she agreed with them. She only remarked—

“It is lucky you are safe here in Montreux among the cake-shops, Katya!”

“People are really just the same here in Montreux as they are in Petrograd or in Riga,” said the Baroness, “only they dare not show it. This long street”—she stretched out her thin white arm—“if we could uncover it, as you may uncover a drain, we should find every evil passion at work. We should find it full of actual or potential thieves, murderers, adulterers, torturers, devils of all kinds. They are held in check here by opinion and the law—that is all. Abolish the law, give the public opinion—which is merely collective hypocrisy—a good shake, and then look at Montreux! Now I am going to bed.”

And she got up, with a sort of frozen tranquillity, bade Derrick good night and went away.

“Moral riff-raff!” said the Princess. “You see what she thinks of us.”

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“ But—forgive me—I don’t think Baroness Hausen is quite normal,” said Derrick.

And they fell into a discussion which lasted till midnight, one of those discussions which Derrick delighted in, about human character and human motives, about the “ why ” at the root of strange actions, the pressure of necessity, moral and physical, upon human beings, the subtle tug of floating ideas at receptive and emotional natures, the driving force of the passions, the apparently fatal moulding-power which circumstance has over the plastic soul of woman and man.

The Princess and he sometimes agreed, sometimes disagreed ; but that didn’t seem to matter, for she evidently had a sincere intelligence which was absolutely bold in expression. She was never irritable, never showed nervousness, but smoked and talked with tireless zest. She was certainly no longer a sentimentalist, whatever she had been in the days of her youth, but she showed none of the perverted cynicism of the Baroness Hausen.

In the course of the conversation Derrick discovered that the Princess had long been a

widow, and that at one time she had been attached to the Russian Court. She was evidently familiar with many of the well-known men of the time on the Continent, but told Derrick she had never visited England.

"I have never had any children," she mentioned casually, "and I have never wished to. I should be afraid of handing on miseries."

He received from her the net impression of a vivid and bold nature which in long contact with the world had learnt to expect very little really from life. She told him that she believed in the doctrine of reincarnation.

"So I have always the sensation of passing like a shadow along a wall," she said.

"And do other people seem to you shadows?" he asked her.

"Many do. They appear to me as grotesques and I can scarcely be civil to them. But there are others who seem to mean a great deal. Perhaps one has met them before and will meet them again, farther along the road."

Her large black eyes were fixed upon him with a sort of musing abstraction.

"Perhaps one has to help them or to be

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helped by them," she added. "I am not so cynical as poor Katya. I do believe in disinterested human kindness. It is rare, but it exists. People have told me that there is much of it among the English."

"I hope so," said Derrick.

"Ah, you value and believe in it! How Katya would laugh at you!"

And then they separated. The Princess went up to bed and Derrick lit yet another cigar. His brain felt waked up, excited, young even. And he had no inclination to sleep.

CHAPTER IV

TEN days passed by, and Derrick was still in Montreux, and had no intention of leaving it. He felt much better in health. His nervous depression, his bitter sense of the uselessness of life, had vanished. The slight heart trouble to which the doctor in London had alluded, and which had manifested itself to Derrick by unpleasant thumpings at night, and by a curious illusion of his heart being loose and independent upon his pillow instead of in his breast, was abated. He generally slept well. And the gliding, the soft and empty life of this little town of idlers, stretched out in its narrow space between the mountains and the waters, soothed him deliciously after his labours of a policeman, a clerk, a hospital attendant and a lorry-driver. Each morning he woke up with the delightful feeling that there was nothing to be done in the day, that the hours were entirely his own, that no duties demanded either to be accom-

plished or to be avoided contemptibly. He had only to be idle among other idlers ; for nobody did anything in Montreux. Even the absolutely penniless did absolutely nothing, except stroll about, look into the shop-windows, visit the tea-shops, listen to the music at the Casino or in the pavilion near the Montreux Palace, pay visits to acquaintances in the hotels, and gamble mildly now and then at night. There were a few English, it is true, who were supposed to play golf near Aigle, to get up billiard matches at the English club, and to go in for premature winter sports on the mountains, but they were swamped by the Russians, Poles, Turks, Germans, Italians, Egyptians, Greeks, Rumanians and others, who never dreamed of attempting such strenuous diversions. One saw nothing of them. They were merely a legend in which few people believed. Derrick did not meet them. He had come out to Montreux for a thorough change, and it is not a change for an Englishman to meet other Englishmen. Instead he was peeping in, as if through a crack in a door almost, at a tiny section of the human race, a minute assemblage of the

nations, waiting after the great war which had shaken the world to its foundations, waiting in hotels, manicure shops, libraries, tea pavilions—for what? What did these strangely various people of different nationalities expect as they lived in this curious and almost numb pause between war and genuine peace? What did they hope would come about of good for them, who had abandoned their homes, lost the greater part of their fortunes, been driven from their careers, had their estates confiscated, or been forced to abandon countries not their own with which they had been identified for years and in which all their interests lay, enemy countries to them now by the fortune of war? And the utterly ruined financially—what was going to happen to them in the future when the world got going again?

Derrick often wondered as he looked at the crowd of faces around him at the hours of tea, or music, or gambling, or more, narrowly at individual faces seen in the street, by the lake shore, casually in a shop, or in the passage of an hotel. And he divined silent and slow tragedies in the pretty town with

its neat, gay, even luxurious aspect; he seemed to hear tragedy sometimes in the tone of a voice speaking some strange language, and coming to him, perhaps, out of the twilight as he went by beneath an arcade; or the sound of a heavy step on the pavement suggested it to him, as a very well-dressed man passed him, with the careworn, wary look of diplomacy fixed irrevocably on a lined face; or it was half revealed to him by the pale silhouette of a woman, glimpsed through a drifting of snow.

Nevertheless, he was happier in Montreux than he had been for a very long time. The War had taught him that it is useless to let oneself perpetually loose from one's moorings in pity for others. In sheer self-defence, like many men and women, he had cultivated if not a certain surface hardness at least a deliberate egoism. This was his well-earned holiday. His health of body and mind needed it. So he let himself go to his egoism, or tried to as much as he could. And he realized Montreux without bleeding at the heart for its woes. His brain was interested by it, even fascinated. And he was not going to

allow his heart to be touched to any real suffering.

Besides, in spite of all, the aspect of the place was cosy and cheerful, and then he had companionship. There was no loneliness for him in Montreux, and he had forgotten all about being middle-aged, and congratulated himself every day on not being married.

For if he had been married he could not have had his friendship with Princess Aranensky. It was a purely intellectual friendship, of course, but a wife would never have understood that, he told himself. For married women never believe in the intellect as a link between the sexes.

Every day he was with the Princess; sometimes upstairs in her sitting-room—although ruined she had a very nice sitting-room looking out on to the lake, and, as she had hinted, furnished with cushions, of ample size and delicious colours—sometimes by the shore of the lake, in the gardens, under the arcades, sometimes at the Casino, listening to music or to French plays, or watching the gamblers, among them Baroness Hausen, risking their small sums of money at *boule*,

sometimes among the snows high up on the mountains. And whenever he was with her he felt exceptionally alive. Her mind and her temperament stimulated his. She seemed to set all the life that was in him in active motion; to stir up the dormant energies of his mind, almost to create in him energies. Through her he realized his own intelligence as he had never realized it before, and that fact led him to consider her the cleverest woman he had ever met. For men always think women clever who make them feel clever.

In some ways she seemed to him quite unlike other women. For instance, she would never allow him to spend a penny on her. If they went to a tea-shop together she insisted on paying for her own cup of tea. If they took the train to Glion she paid for her own ticket. If they drove in a cab she paid her share of the fare to the cabman and half the tip. Derrick's remonstrances were in vain.

"I pay my share, or we don't do these little things together," she said.

Once or twice Derrick ventured to hint

that he was very well-to-do, that the War had not done much harm to his bank balance. It made no difference.

"The pauper who pays her way has one asset left," she remarked.

"What asset?"

"Her self-respect."

"You're right!" he answered, thinking with a certain irony of various women he knew in London.

He had noticed that she was very fond of flowers. There were always flowers in her room. So one day he bought her a basket of roses. She accepted it and thanked him with cordiality. But she added:

"Don't give me any more, please."

"Why not?"

"Still the same reason—the pauper's one asset."

"But every man——"

"I know you will yield to my perhaps foolish wish."

Sometimes the Baroness was with them when they went out, but she never accompanied them on any excursion.

"Katya doesn't care for the snows," the

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Princess said. "She has had enough of them in Russia. If she had any money she would go away from here."

"Where would she go?"

"To Monte Carlo probably."

"Not to India too?" said Derrick, remembering the Princess's remark about Asia.

"Katya hasn't my reasons for wishing to go to India."

Derrick wondered what the Princess's reasons were, but he did not ask her. She was so frank and unreserved that he always felt that she would tell him what she wanted to tell, and that if she were silent about something her silence was intentional. But eventually he came to believe that her desire to go to Asia was connected somehow with her views on religion. He found that she had studied the doctrines of the Buddha and had a wide knowledge of books on theosophy. Once she said to him:

"Europe is only the playground, or the battleground of ignorant, naughty children. The home of all wisdom is Asia. Why didn't I go there when I was rich, instead of to Monte Carlo, where one can smell the varnish?"

The Princess's physique seemed to Derrick as strong as her mind. Although he judged that she must be well over forty, she was an untiring walker, and delighted in walking uphill.

"When I go upwards," she said, "I always feel as if I were leaving all the mesquineries below me, down in the depths with the little people."

As they walked in the snows they discussed everything—or so it seemed to Derrick. And sometimes in the heart of the snow-covered woods they stood together silently for a long time. The Princess leaned on her pointed stick, lit a cigarette at Derrick's match, and they looked at, listened to, the mysterious winter. Now and then a mass of snow slipped from an overburdened tree. And that seemed the winter speaking to them. The sun shone, or the clouds came down, wrapping them in a greater intimacy; they saw the moon with its crystal beauty, the twilight with its curious effects of subtle primrose or dusky ash colour; sometimes the far gleam of a smouldering sunset, heavy, it seemed, with a burning weariness; and then

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they walked on, and returned to Montreux laden with memories.

The Princess had once said that Nature was camouflage. It might be so. But Derrick had never felt Nature so deeply as since he had been at Montreux.

With Baroness Hausen Derrick managed to get on fairly well, but he was always repelled by her outlook on life, and sometimes wondered how Princess Aranensky could be at ease with her, could be so little critical of her. What she had seen, and perhaps had endured in Russia—Derrick never knew what experiences she had gone through—had certainly affected her vitally, and in a terrible way. She was frozen in cynicism. There was at times something coldly ferocious in her manifestation of her condition which made Derrick almost physically distressed, as at the sight of an abruptly uncovered cancerous wound. He wondered sometimes why he could not pity her. Perhaps it was because pity demands outstretched hands, and Baroness Hausen's hands were never outstretched, except at the tables to gather in winnings.

She was a persistent gambler but a very unlucky one. Unlike the fat Armenian, who was of course very rich, she seldom brought off a *coup*.

"It is a mercy the maximum is only five francs," Princess Aranensky said one day to Derrick. "If it were more we should very soon have to leave this hotel."

"Why do you let her play?" he asked.

"Let Katya do anything! My dear friend, no one on this earth could prevent her from doing anything she had a fancy to do, if it were possible for her to do it. Those who believe in nothing are always ungovernable. It is belief which breeds fear, and it is fear which breeds in men the instinct to obey."

"Are you fond of the Baroness?" he asked, abruptly.

"I am very sorry for Katya," said the Princess. "And so would you be if you knew all that has happened to her."

But she never told him what had happened.

One evening the Princess proposed to Derrick to go up on the following day by the mountain railway from Aigle to Leysin, and to

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lunch at the Grand Hotel "among the consumptives."

"It is an unsmart Davos," she said. "The snows and the ill people who hope to be cured by the snows are there, but there are no bands, no cocottes, no gay young men, no trippers. What do you say? Will it make you melancholy to spend one day among Doctor Rollier's patients?"

"Not with you!" he answered.

"Will you come, too, Katya?"

"No, thank you," said Baroness Hausen. "I have no wish to assist at the punishments of the Immanent Will! Besides, I am going to Geneva to-morrow."

She looked significantly at the Princess.

"Baron Krane has lent me his car for the day."

The Princess said no more. But Derrick noticed that, as if prompted by her friend's look, she lifted her right hand and gently touched the long strings of pearls she was wearing.

Derrick had often glanced at those pearls and wondered how much they were worth, not because he judged the beauty of jewels

by their exact money value, but because he remembered the Princess's poverty.

He believed that she considered herself a poor woman, because there was something in her whole way of being which carried to him the conviction of her sincerity. Intellectually she was sincere. He felt positive of that. She said what she thought in their discussions, regardless of his opinions. Why should she be less sincere about the facts of her life which she chose to speak about? On the other hand, it was certainly strange to find a woman who asserted that she was a pauper, ruined, living in a first-rate hotel, with a sitting-room, a maid, dresses and hats which evidently came from Paris, wonderful furs, and jewels which looked, to his inexperienced eyes, immensely valuable. Sometimes he could not help remembering his conversation with the director of the Monney; and the latter's remark: "There are princesses here without a halfpenny." He had asked, "But how on earth can they live in hotels?" And the director had referred to them as "living mysteries, who live without having the means to live," and had gone on to hint at all sorts

of doubtful expedients for money getting. Derrick could not possibly associate in his mind Princess Aranensky with anything doubtful. But perhaps she sold "things." She might have possessed other jewels, other magnificent furs than those which he had seen her wearing. She might have got rid of them at a price. But—in the future?

It was curious, and somehow it was rather melancholy, to know so much about her mind and so little about her life. They were, in a sense, really intimate, and yet in a sort of way—that was how he put it to himself—she was a stranger to him.

He realized that his liking for her had become very strong, stronger than he had been conscious of till now. The measure of his wish to be truly intimate with her was the measure of it. Under her immense frankness lay—that was evident—an immense reserve. Well, of course he would never try to break through it. Perhaps if they had belonged to the same nation she would have taken him more readily into her confidence, have relied upon him as she had certainly not relied.

He was conscious of an obscure irritation.

On the following day they started off early to go to Leysin.

They had to wait for some time at the station, and while they were there the Orient Express came in from Paris, many hours late. The great cars labelled "Bucharest," "Belgrade," "Trieste," were thronged with weary-looking travellers, who stared out at this—to them—small wayside station with lacklustre, or rather insolent, eyes. Some sat on tip-up seats in the corridor; others leaned against the cushioned walls of the small compartments. A bald-headed man offered himself up to the gaze of Montreux lying on his back in bed, smoking a huge cigar, and reading a French novel. An old gentleman wearing a fez peered out through gold-rimmed spectacles. Near him some black-haired, yellow-skinned children pointed at a Swiss soldier, nodded their heads and laughed as they sucked mandarin oranges. After a brief stop the foremost of the two huge engines which drew the train gave a prolonged shriek.

"They are going!" said the Princess to Derrick.

But the train did not move for two or

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three minutes, and then glided away almost mysteriously towards the Near East, without any warning note.

“That train gives me nostalgia !” said the Princess, looking after it. “But come, my friend, here is our train to Aigle.”

Her emphasis on the last word was almost bitter, and perhaps she saw on Derrick’s face a look of hurt disappointment, for she added when they were sitting together in the well-warmed carriage :

“You must forgive me. If you had been in Montreux for more, much more, than five years you would feel as I do when you saw the Orient Express. But now to-day we are going to enjoy ourselves.”

And from that moment she laid herself out to be charming to Derrick.

At Aigle they changed and got into the mountain train whose destination was Leysin. A few peasants were with them, sturdy creatures with ruddy cheeks, large heads and firm, unimaginaive eyes ; and there were some others, not peasants, people from distant places with the seal of consumption set upon them, lonely people being carried up

into the still coldness, the white serenity of the heights, to struggle against death.

Two of these were in the carriage with the Princess and Derrick, and sat opposite to them. One was an Englishman of about thirty, whose sunken grey eyes had a sort of still, controlled despair in them; the other was a swarthy middle-aged woman, probably an Italian, horribly thin, horribly feverish, and of a greenish pallor. These two did not know each other, but from time to time glanced at each other furtively, as the train crept steadily up through the white forests and the snow-fields. On a distant slope Derrick saw two dark figures ski-ing. They glided over the whiteness with amazing rapidity and disappeared. He imagined them shouting as they went, but no sounds reached his ears. The silence of this world seemed a visible thing. The carriage was very warm. One of the consumptives, the Englishman, opened a window for an instant, and immediately the personality of winter was added to theirs—pure, penetrating, aloof and yet full of a thin magic that seemed intentional. The Italian woman cast an agitated glance at the win-

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dow, and the Englishman immediately shut it, and looked down, folding his thin hands together. And even his hands conveyed to Derrick an impression of doom.

The Princess was silent now. Her tall, upright figure was wrapped in a coat of soft mouse-coloured fur, with a wide collar and cuffs, and she wore a round hat of the same fur and gloves of deerskin. As usual, she carried her pointed stick. On her feet were strong boots with nails in the soles. The cold air had brought colour into her smooth cheeks. Her large black eyes, half shut, were turned to the snows with an expression of steady, but rather indifferent, scrutiny. She knew the snows so well that perhaps they had little more to tell her.

Higher and higher they went. At last houses appeared, all of them with strange-looking façades divided into open compartments. On a snow-covered pathway several people stood to stare at the crawling train. One was a girl, with orange-coloured hair, sticky scarlet lips, eyes that from a distance looked like smudges of ink on a structure of sharpened bone. She leaned on a stick and

gazed, bending forward—a painted consumptive.

Where the railway ended they got out.

“We will lunch at the Grand Hotel,” said the Princess, “but let us take a little walk first.”

And they emerged into the wonderful but sad world which nature and a great doctor between them have created far up above Aigle.

To Derrick even the buildings, the hotels, *pensions*, huge sanatoria, looked gaunt and stricken, presenting what he thought of as their hollow eye sockets from which the eyes had been plucked out to the white glare of the snow. The sense of stillness was profound and almost awful. Far off the “Diablerets” showed their rugged crests against a strip of cold lemon-coloured sky, above which were massed bellying clouds of purplish grey. A shuffle of invalids’ feet was faintly audible on the snow, and somewhere below them the thin voice of a bell sounded with peevish persistence.

“It is time for their déjeuner,” said the Princess, “one of the great events of the day up here.”

Suddenly she lifted her arms.

“Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!” she said.
“There is someone—there must be someone whose business it is to punish humanity. Katya will not have it so. She says there is nothing but blind energy. But I say there must be a Personage with a rod.”

“And the reincarnation theory?” said Derrick.

“The rod, perhaps, drives us out of one existence into another, like rabbits driven from hole to hole by a man with a ferret. But who knows—here in Europe?”

She paused. Then she added, with a sort of almost sullen resolution :

“One must go to Asia to find out, or to get near to, the truth. It is not hidden in Montreux—no, nor in Leysin.”

A little later, when they were at lunch in the hotel, amid a crowd of consumptives of many nations, she said :

“Ah, my friend, you do not know what a curse being poor is to one whose only possible joy in life lies in freedom of action. I was rich until this war came, and stayed at Montreux then for my pleasure, knowing

always I could go away whenever the whim took me. I had immense estates in Russia, and went there from time to time. Now I have nothing, and I am a prisoner—at forty-five! How long I shall live I don't know—many years probably.”

She stopped. Then, after a pause, laying one hand on his wrist, she leaned forward and added :

“ Believe me, this war has done nothing but harm, not only material harm, but—what shall I say ?—spiritual harm. No good will come out of it. There is not one person I knew before the War who is not the worse for it.”

“ You mean morally worse ? ”

“ I do. The whole of Europe has received a jolt in the wrong direction. Don't you feel it ? ”

They fell into another of their long discussions. One by one the consumptives got up from their tables and went listlessly away to their rooms to lie down. Derrick did not notice their disappearance. Princess Aranensky had a curious power of taking complete possession of his mind when she chose to.

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In conversation she concentrated. She did not, as many women do, look about the room while she talked, let her mind go to any small happening, attend to the words or movements of other people than those—or than the one—she was with. And she listened with concentration and without restlessness.

At last a waiter, who probably longed to get away and have a rest, presented the bill.

They paid it—as always with bills—between them, and got up.

“How long have we been?” said the Princess.

She looked at her watch.

“My friend, I talk too much. I forget myself in talk!”

“And you make me forget everything too,” said Derrick.

“We shall have time for a little walk before the train goes.”

They went out into the snow-covered grounds of the hotel. But they could not talk there. A notice ordained silence at that hour.

“The poor people are all lying down in their verandas,” said the Princess. “Let us

go on the mountain-side. They cannot hear us there."

They passed through the gate and went down the deserted track between the snow-fields.

It was now intensely cold. The sun had gone, and the almost fierce purity of the air seemed to have grown stronger, more vital, to be asserting itself almost aggressively.

"If I were one of those ill ones I think I should get to hate this air," said the Princess.

"Why?"

"It seems to be crying out how pure it is! It seems to be marking the contrast between nature and man in an almost vulgar way."

Again they fell into talk, resuming their discussion of the *salle-à-manger*. Derrick, perhaps partly for argument's sake, refused to agree with the Princess's contention that only moral harm had come out of the War, that people were the worse instead of the better for it. He pointed to the nobilities, the self-sacrifice, the wonderful resignation in sorrow, the marvellous examples of courage, endurance and even of tenderness which would never have been manifested but for the War.

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"Yes, yes," she allowed, almost impatiently. "But I say the balance is weighed down on the wrong side. The net result of it is that we are not better but worse because of this war, morally worse. There is more immorality, more robbery, more brutality, more hardness, more selfishness everywhere than there was before—in all classes. People who do the most impossible things excuse themselves by saying, 'We couldn't help it'—or 'we can't help it. We are not quite ourselves. We are suffering from the effects of the War.' Shell-shock is the universal excuse. I should use it myself, I know, if necessary."

Just then she cast a curious little glance at Derrick out of her long eyes.

"And—perhaps there is really something in it," she added, slowly. "Is Europe normal at this moment? Is Montreux normal?" She paused. "Am I normal?"

Derrick said:

"I never knew you before the War, but you seem to me to be perfectly normal."

"Ah, perhaps in my subtler way I am as abnormal as you think poor Katya is."

"Oh, no, you aren't."

"See, the twilight is coming already! Let us turn."

They began to retrace their steps, and went towards the station. For it was now nearly time for the departure of the train.

"I feel since the War that nothing matters very much," said the Princess. "And that is a dangerous feeling. It has got hold of nearly everyone and it leads to the loosening of the cement which once held things together. Do you know—don't think me a snob—I believe one of the most tenacious of all human things is the feeling of aristocracy in one who is born what is called an aristocrat, the feeling which forbids certain things, thought little of by many, to the aristocrat. I call it the 'That-I-can't-do' instinct. You know, of course, what I mean."

"Yes."

"Well—the War has touched even that feeling. Noblesse oblige—even that has lost half, or more than half, its meaning since the War. Montreux, little Montreux, my prison cell, has taught me that."

A sombre, almost a heavy, look had come

into her face, giving to her rather rough-hewn features something of brutality.

“There are more farewells than those we say to the dying,” she said. “There are more terrible farewells—to ancient virtues we thought ingrained. There is nothing—nothing which cannot be uprooted. There is nothing which a human being might not do if a sufficient reason arose.”

“But you are almost as cynical to-day—in what you say—as Baroness Hausen. Surely you would never let her influence you?”

For a moment the Princess reddened, and an angry look came into her eyes.

“Katya—influence *me*!” she said, proudly.

But in an instant her anger died in a sort of dark melancholy.

“No, it is not the Katyas who really influence us, my friend,” she said. “It is the terrible *Zeitgeist*; it is the Spirit of the Time.”

CHAPTER V

THAT night, as often happened, Derrick dined at the same table as the Princess and Baroness Hausen. He noticed that neither woman seemed quite as usual. The Princess was certainly abstracted. Her normal concentration, to him one of her greatest attractions, had vanished. She showed a curious absence of mind in conversation, and even talked at random sometimes, as if she scarcely knew what was the subject in hand. Her eyes were perpetually roving about the room vaguely, and Derrick suffered under the unpleasant conviction that for once he was boring her. In despair he devoted himself to the Baroness, who had returned late from Geneva.

She at least was not absent-minded. Her cruel intelligence was "all there," but her frosty malignancy of outlook struck Derrick more unpleasantly than ever before. It even roused in him a strong feeling of opposition,

and tempted him to get into an argument with her and to show his teeth. Hitherto he had never strongly resented her peculiar and strangely unsympathetic outlook on life and humanity, though it had always been disagreeable to him, but to-night something exceptionally assured, even arrogant, in her cynicism stung him, went home to him personally. She irritated him, got on his nerves, and he found himself asking, "Why should I allow this young woman to pontificate about human nature as if she alone had all the secrets of worldly knowledge?" For some time, however, he resisted his inclination to stand up to her, and let her say what she would without protest, though without any humbug of personal agreement with her views. She was in an exceptionally bad mood to-night. That was obvious. If the Princess was bored, the Baroness was in that concentrated condition which is bred of a morose temper, held in control but secretly longing for a victim. That she was looking unusually handsome specially annoyed Derrick, he scarcely knew why. As he glanced at her fair, shining beauty, and starry but Polar

blue eyes, he even resented her youth, a thing he had never done before.

"She's insufferable in her cynicism," he thought. "I should like to teach her a lesson."

But how? It was not his business to do that. If the Princess, a woman, her friend, and much older than she was, suffered her without protest, even seemed quite satisfied with, or at any rate quite indifferent to, her excoriating views of every activity, every demonstration of human beings, what could he seem to do but quietly accept her as she was? But to-night she got dreadfully upon his nerves. He tingled with dislike of her, and when he looked at her felt that his eyes were almost attacking her. She did not seem to notice this, however, and went on composedly pouring out a stream of scathing comment on the refugees in Switzerland, while the Princess crumbled her bread, played with the food set before her, sipped her claret, and stared about the room.

"Do you like anyone?" at length said Derick, unable to bear any more vituperation.

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“Do you believe in anyone? Do you trust anyone?”

The Baroness raised her pale eyebrows.

“Some people are less unpleasant to me than others, of course,” she said.

“Is that all?”

“I don’t sentimentalize about anyone.”

“You certainly don’t!” he rejoined, with a laugh.

“I look upon sentimentality as a proof of ignorance.”

“Ignorance of what?”

“Of human nature.”

“If you’ll excuse my saying so I think you make a great mistake in generalizing so much as you do about humanity. Men and women are individuals and have widely differing qualities.”

She smiled, with a sort of cold and superior venom which almost maddened him.

“I allow that, of course. But, as Schopenhauer points out——”

“I loathe Schopenhauer,” Derrick interrupted, almost with violence. “I think his attribution of every manifestation of humanity to some low and detestable motive, some base

self-interest, or some abominable intention to do harm, shows him to have had a warped mind, and to have been totally wanting in true insight. Your Tolstoy with his gospel of love got far nearer to the truth of human beings than Schopenhauer ever did."

"Our Tolstoy with his gospel of love was a humbug of genius," retorted the Baroness.

"We don't think so in England."

"Really! And yet I have always understood that England was in possession of a special means for recognizing and testing humbug in others."

"And what means is that?" asked Derrick, unable to keep a certain defiance out of his tone and manner.

Baroness Hausen opened her pale lips to reply, but she shut them again without speaking. She had received a warning look from the Princess, who just at that moment, it seemed, had begun to pay attention to the conversation. Derrick, who in his acute nervous irritation was exceptionally alert and observant that night, caught that look on the wing and was startled by it; it was so keen, so subtle, and so swiftly gone. It was

as if a door flew open and instantly closed again, leaving him with the impression that he had nearly, but not quite, caught sight of some strange and unknown, even unguessed at, personality. Yes, it had been there behind the door, but he had not had time to look really at it. Yet something of it he must have seen—but what? A pallor? A gleam as of fire from unseen eyes? The suggestion of a razor-sharp silhouette? For a moment he felt confused and painfully alone, like a man in a deserted house at night.

“Let me tell you why many of us Russians think Tolstoy was a humbug,” said the Princess.

And from that moment, but as if with an effort, she concentrated.

After dinner she did a thing which, considering what had happened at the dinner-table, Derrick thought strange. She asked him, in the presence of Baroness Hausen, to escort the Baroness to the Casino.

“Katya wants to play,” she said, “and I promised her to go, but for once I am tired. The sight of those consumptives has tired my heart and I want to sleep. I shall take a

drug to-night, now, immediately. Will you go with Katya ? ”

Of course, Derrick could only say yes. The Princess bade him good night with a warm hand-grip, and went upstairs with the Baroness, who was to put on her furs. Meanwhile, feeling all on edge with intense nervous irritation, Derrick got into his overcoat, took his hat and gloves, and waited in the hall near the bureau.

“ It is snowing, m’sieu ! ” said the hall porter, looking up from some letters he was sorting.

“ Heavily ? ”

“ Yes, m’sieu, heavily.”

A ray of hope lighted up Derrick’s darkness. No carriage had been ordered. It would probably be difficult to get one at that hour. Possibly when she knew the state of the weather Baroness Hausen would give up the Casino. Derrick fervently hoped so. He moved away from the bureau. He could not keep still that evening. His friend the director who was in his room on the right facing the corridor which led to the dining-room, saw him, smiled, and came out to have a

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little chat. He had done everything in his power to make Derrick's stay comfortable and Derrick had taken a liking to him.

"Unusually bad weather, m'sieu," he remarked. "You are going to brave it?"

"It seems so, unless when Baroness Hausen hears it is snowing she gives up her idea of gambling to-night."

"Oh, you are going with the Baroness?"

He paused. Then he said:

"A beautiful woman."

"She is very good looking," said Derrick.

"It is wonderful—after what she has been through," said the director. "But"—he nearly closed his eyes—"it is better not to think of those things. One doesn't wish to have the nightmare."

He evidently knew something about the Baroness's experiences among the Bolsheviks. Derrick felt curious, but he only said:

"It would take a good deal to give one the nightmare after this war."

"Mais oui! But there are some things——"

Again he stopped.

"Madame the Princess is going?"

“Not to-night.”

“She is a very distinguished lady, very distinguished—one of the greatest families in Russia. But anyone can see that! I shall be very sorry if she leaves us.”

“Leaves you!” said Derrick, startled. “But surely Princess Aranensky is not leaving Montreux?”

“Leaving Montreux—oh, no, m’sieu! Her Excellency is not leaving Montreux. I only meant that I shall be very sorry if she has to change her hotel.”

At this moment Baroness Hausen, wrapped up in furs, got out of the lift.

“Do you know that it is snowing very hard, Baroness?” said Derrick, going up to her.

“Is it? Well, never mind, I’ve got an umbrella.”

And she held up a tightly furled silk umbrella with a handle of jade.

“Wouldn’t it be wise to try and get a carriage?”

“That might take a long time. Are you afraid of a little snow?”

“Of course not,” said Derrick, stiffly.

"Then let us go."

They started off together.

It was slippery outside and very dark, and Derrick felt obliged to offer the Baroness his arm. She took it at once with an air of firm decision, and they walked slowly on together down the deserted street. Derrick said nothing. That evening he felt so acutely hostile to his companion that he simply could not "make conversation" to her. He was unusually tired, too, after the long day at Leysin, and was longing for solitude and bed. The touch of the Baroness, the feeling of her body against his, was hateful to him at that moment. It seemed to create an ugly intimacy between those whose minds and souls were worlds away from each other. Buried deep in his comfortless thoughts he was startled when he heard a voice speaking in the darkness.

"What was that?" he said. "I didn't hear."

"I said that you disliked me very much this evening."

"My dear Baroness!"

"Oh, yes. Your eyes at dinner were full

of hatred. They attacked me. I don't mind that. Why should you like me? Anna is your friend, not I. But when I am at the tables please don't turn your mind upon me with hostility. I have a feeling that if you do it will bring me bad luck. And I must win to-night."

"I hope to Heaven you will."

"I must. You probably have no idea what a situation Anna is in."

"She has never gone into that with me."

"No, she wouldn't. They talk of obliging her to leave the hotel."

"Obliging the Princess!"

"Yes—she can't pay enough any longer. Already she has had to leave I don't know how many places—the Lorus, the Eden, the Montreux Palace."

"How horrible!"

"It is very disagreeable. I went to Geneva to-day to try to sell her pearls. Unfortunately, I failed. I couldn't get a good enough price for them. Those who come to Switzerland now to buy the jewels of those who are starving, naturally—being human—are ferocious profiteers. I wouldn't throw Anna's

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pearls to such wolves, so I don't see how she can go on paying her bills at the Monney."

Derrick understood now the Princess's preoccupation during dinner.

"But if she leaves there what will she do?"

"I suppose she must find a cheap pension. But that sort of thing won't suit her."

"Of course not."

"And even a pension keeper expects to be paid. She has furs and things which she might sell, of course; but again it would be to wolves—wolves who come here from Paris to gnaw the flesh off our Russian bones."

"How utterly disgusting!"

"Almost everything that is thoroughly human is utterly disgusting, in spite of your anger with me at dinner. Here we are! Now please don't stand near me or stare at me when I am playing or I shall lose my money."

"Do you think I have the evil eye, then?"

"I know nothing about that. But you dislike me, and, therefore, you might bring me bad luck."

And she left Derrick and pushed her way

implacably through the small crowd round the tables.

As he knew it would be almost impossible to stay in the gamblers' room and to keep his eyes always turned away from the Baroness, Derrick went away and strolled about the almost deserted Casino. The weather, no doubt, had kept all but determined gamblers at home. He saw no one whom he knew, and chafed with irritation at having to dance attendance on the Baroness. His mind ran perpetually on his talk with her in the street. It had shocked him. Although the Princess had several times mentioned the fact of her poverty, he knew that he had never realized it thoroughly until now. Having always seen her beautifully dressed and living in luxury, having always known her scrupulously fair about money matters, determined to "pay her way" whenever she and he were together and sharing pleasures, generous, even lavish, in the matter of tips, he had supposed that, though no doubt "hard up" in comparison with her condition before the War, she must be still moderately well off. He knew that very rich people, when reduced to moderate

means, often speak as if they were beggars. Why not the Princess Aranensky? But now that illusion was gone. A woman of her rank who had been turned out of several hotels—for that was what it came to if the Baroness's statements were true, and he had no reason to doubt them—must be almost penniless. What was going to become of her? What would she do in the future? He felt full of pity, of sympathy for her. He longed to help her. The question was how to help her.

Derrick was very well off, and by nature a chivalrous and generous man. He would gladly have offered to lend the Princess some money, but he felt quite certain that she would refuse a loan. For how could she ever repay it? The condition of Russia, where, no doubt, all her fortune had been placed, forbade any hope of better things for a long time, perhaps for many years to come. Such a woman could never hope to earn any money. To lend to her, therefore, would be to give under another name. And he was positive that she would never accept such a gift, she who had always refused even the gift of a cup of tea at his hands.

With Baroness Hausen it would be different, he thought. He could imagine her accepting anything, considering it, perhaps, as partial repayment for what she had gone through at the hands of humanity. But the Princess was not like the Baroness—thank God! He almost hated the one, and he almost——

He sat down on a straight chair. A small orchestra was playing in the distance, and seemed to him to confuse his mind, preventing clear thinking. And then he was tired this evening. The sound of the orchestra reminded him—he did not know why—of the months just before the outbreak of war, of the delirium of pleasure which had preceded the crash. He thought of the craze for the Russian ballet, of the mania women had had for undressing, of the dances borrowed from South American negroes, of the madness in art, of the hysterical lectures on Futurism gravely discussed by humbugs who should have known better. He remembered the remark of a friend who, with him, had been watching some young people dancing in the ball-room of a famous London

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hotel, "When are they going down on all fours?"

And what was the difference now? Europe in the meanwhile had been deluged with blood. The rod had been used unsparingly. But did punishment have any real, any lasting effect upon the soul of man? Was the Princess right in her pessimism? Was he wrong in his secret resistance to pessimism? He compared his circumstances with hers and drew a conclusion from the comparison. But she must not be ruined in nature as Baroness Hausen had been.

Perhaps he had the power to prevent that, if only he could somehow persuade her to let him exercise it.

The orchestra stopped.

He thought of the pearls.

"You can buy jewels in Montreux cheap, very cheap. And if you can carry them to London there is a nice profit for you!" Those words of the director of the Monney started up in his mind. He had hardly attended to them at the time, but he had remembered them, and now he repeated them to himself, turning over, while he did so, a certain matter

in his mind. When, presently, he got up from his chair and strolled towards the room where the orchestra was again playing (this time a selection from "Carmen"), he was aware of two possible means by which he might save the Princess from the ignominy and ruin which threatened her. He might try to persuade her to marry him and to share his fortune ; or he might suggest driving a bargain with her, buying her pearls at a moderate price in order to make money by selling them in Paris or London. In the latter event he would have to smuggle them over the frontier. Of course, the idea of making money out of her difficulty was abhorrent to him, but his knowledge of her character made him feel almost sure that she would never consent to sell her jewels to him unless he was able to convince her that by doing so she was putting him in the way of making money for himself, that he came to her as a would-be speculator, not as a would-be benefactor.

And the other alternative ?

Derrick was now fifty-three, and had long ago given up all thought of marrying. Like most men he had wished to marry, and had

once met a woman whom he had felt he could be very happy with. But it was a long time ago. She had been in love with another man and had refused Derrick. Since then he had never wished to link his life permanently with any woman's. Certainly he had often felt lonely; but gradually he had come to value almost inordinately what he thought of as his "freedom." Prolonged observation of the world had led him to the belief that the proportion of unsatisfactory marriages to satisfactory marriages was as three to one. The secrets of sad marriages are often very well kept, but Derrick was a close observer, and frequently felt what he did not actually know. A fairly long life, much of which had been passed in the society of his fellow-beings, had made him distrust profoundly what is sometimes called "married bliss." As well as this distrust there was another reason against changing his state. He considered himself too old to marry. There was, he thought, something almost ridiculous in offering grey hairs and a body past its prime, to say nothing of a possibly wrinkled mind, to an attractive woman. Cer-

tainly Princess Aranensky, though energetic, healthy and, apparently, strong, was no longer a young woman. But nevertheless——

It was rather marvellous to Derrick that he should even for a moment be thinking of marriage as possible to him. It was evident that he had grown to care for the Princess far more than he had suspected till now. She had made life interesting to him again, vital, definitely worth something. She had swept away his morbid distrust of himself, had subtly put him on better, even on quite good, terms with himself.

She must be a singularly courageous woman. He tried mentally to put himself into her situation without imaginatively changing his sex. Could he have shown such a brave face to the world in similar circumstances? He doubted it. But, of course, he would have set to and worked. She couldn't do that. And yet she held up her head, and had concealed from him any suggestion, even the smallest hint, of despair.

And she still had a sitting-room and filled it with flowers.

Fatalism, perhaps, had her fast in its grip.

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It was difficult for him, an Englishman, to understand such a nature as hers, thoroughly, even drastically, Russian, perhaps, under its cosmopolitan surface. And yet how splendidly they got on together !

He thought of the look she had cast at Baroness Hausen during dinner, and wondered what exactly it had meant. It had made him feel suddenly shut out, a thoroughly lonely man, pushed away from a friendship he certainly valued very much. But, of course, two women friends, both of them Russians, must have understandings which he couldn't share. He was, perhaps, hypersensitive in matters connected with the Princess. Didn't that prove that his feeling for her was much stronger than he had ever suspected till this evening ?

He tried to imagine how it would be if he and she were married. But that was a job far too difficult for him in his present condition. He went to the restaurant and asked for a coffee. The snows, he thought, had got into his brain and clouded it as they clouded the branches of the trees in the forests. When he had finished the coffee he

again walked about, and presently found himself at the entrance to the room where the gamblers were. Despite the prohibition of Baroness Hausen he stood still there and looked into the room, seeking her out.

She had got hold of a chair and was sitting. A cigarette was between her pale lips. She looked stern, concentrated, and almost old in her intentness. Derrick could not tell from her expression whether she had been winning or not. Besides—did it really matter? This was not Monte Carlo. However lucky she was the Baroness could not hope to redeem the fortunes of herself and the Princess—linked together it seemed, though he was not sure of that—at the tables of Montreux.

It was a bad face, he thought, considering the Baroness, who was evidently too absorbed by the game to be aware of his presence in the doorway. The beauty of the colouring, the regularity of the features, were spoiled for him by the sheer ugliness of the expression. This proved to him that he was anything rather than a pagan. Moral beauty meant something to him, after all.

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“ But most gamblers are ugly while they are gambling ! ” he reflected.

He had noticed that again and again in the rooms at Monte Carlo.

What would the Princess look like if she were playing ?

She had never gambled while he had been at Montreux, and had sometimes spoken of Katya's taste for *boule* with a slight touch of almost pitying sarcasm.

Could she really like Katya ? And if she were able to was it possible that she could ever be sincerely fond of him ? Would not the one liking rule out the other, proving that her soul and his could never really touch ?

As he asked himself this question Baroness Hausen looked up and met his eyes. Instantly she got up and came towards him, pushing her way through the people behind and around her. Her face was even uglier than before as she said :

“ I begged you not to look at me, not to turn your mind on me ! ”

“ But, my dear Baroness, I have only just——”

"I have been winning for once. Everything went well with me until a moment ago, when I began to lose. I lost three coups running, looked up, and there you were standing and gazing straight at me. It really is too bad, when you promised me——"

"I beg your pardon!" said Derrick, rigid with vexation. "When you have finished playing you will find me in the hall."

And he turned abruptly and left her.

"She treats me exactly as if I were a servant!" he thought. "But this shall be the last time. I'll never submit to this sort of thing again."

For a moment he was inclined to include the Princess as well as Baroness Hausen within the circle of his hostile thoughts.

"The Princess makes a convenience of me," he said to himself. "She must know I hate the Baroness, and yet she palms her off on me. I might as well be a footman and have done with it."

He tingled with vexation as he hovered about, waiting the pleasure of that detestable young woman. He felt sure that she would not come until play was over for the

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night, and so it happened. The Casino was about to be closed when she appeared at last.

"I'm afraid it has been rather dull for you," she said. "Why didn't you play?"

"You gave me a very strong hint to keep out of the room," he said.

"You must forgive me. Probably you don't need money. I do. And I have such terrible luck. To-night I was making a little for once, and naturally I didn't want the luck to turn. But I fear I was brusque. Now do pardon me, please."

"I beg you to say no more about it," said Derrick, with a stiff and very English manner.

They set out on the walk home. This time Derrick did not—he simply could not—offer the Baroness his arm. Nor did he attempt to keep up any conversation. They two could never be friends. He knew that. And he was not in the mood for pretences. When they reached the hotel he was thankful. The lights were still on in the room just beyond the hall, but there was nobody there. In the bureau was the night porter reading the *Gazette de Lausanne*.

"Good night," Derrick said to the Baroness.

But instead of going upstairs to her room, as he expected, she said :

"Let us go in there for a minute. I am not sleepy, and want a last cigarette. And let us have something to drink."

"What would you like ?"

"Oh, a brandy and soda will do. But you must have one with me."

"I'm really not——"

"I can't drink alone."

"Very well."

He told the hall porter, and followed the Baroness into the room beyond the hall.

When the two drinks were brought Derrick lighted his pipe. He felt that he was "in for it," and must try to make the best of things. There was no hope of getting rid of the Baroness yet. She looked abominably wide awake, and evidently was far too mentally tough to be made uncomfortable by other people's feelings. But though Derrick stayed with her he determined not to make conversation to her, or to help her socially. Not even his sense of politeness was capable of that at this moment. After saying a few casual things

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about the fortunes of the gamblers that evening she turned in her chair, faced him fully, and said :

“ You like Anna very much, don't you ? ”

“ Of course I like the Princess,” answered Derrick, rigidly.

“ And she likes you better than anyone else here.”

“ I don't know about that.”

“ Well, I know it.”

“ If it is so I am very glad,” returned Derrick.

“ I want to ask you something that she would never ask for herself. Can you help her ? ”

“ In what way ? ”

“ If something isn't done by somebody she will be put out on the pavement very soon.”

“ I should naturally be very glad to help the Princess, but I hardly think she would wish such a matter to be discussed between us.”

“ But she will never speak to you, and if she knew I had spoken she would hate me for it.”

“ Then, surely, we had better talk of something else.”

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"No. I made up my mind at Geneva to speak to you, and I am going to."

Her manner was as implacable as her face, and Derrick realized the absolute uselessness of attempting any opposition to her. There was no appeal against this young woman's determination to do whatever she wanted to do, because she was totally devoid of all natural sensitiveness.

"She has about as much delicacy in her as a steam-roller has," thought Derrick, in desperation.

He said nothing, only pulled at his pipe and looked on the ground, lest his companion might think that his eyes were again attacking her.

"There is only one way in which you could help Anna," continued the Baroness Hausen, "and that is by buying her pearls."

"If the Princess wishes——" began Derrick.

But she interrupted him.

"Anna would never ask you to do such a thing. She would rather starve than do that, because I know she considers you as a friend, and she has ideals about friendship,

especially between women and men, which I don't share. No, I am asking you. If Anna could only sell her pearls for a reasonable sum all would be well. That is why I went to Geneva to-day. I knew there was a man there from Paris—a soi-disant gentleman—who was buying jewels cheap to sell them dear. I thought I might persuade him to give me a reasonable price, six thousand pounds, for the pearls, which are worth at least double to a dealer. I failed. That is why I am speaking to you. If only you would buy Anna's pearls you would save her from humiliation and make a heavy profit for yourself at the—— What is the matter?"

Derrick had got up from his seat.

"Baroness, I'm sorry, but I must decline to discuss the Princess's affairs with you."

"But——"

"You don't understand me. I am not the sort of man who tries to make a profit out of a woman in distress."

"I only wished to point out to you that you would not suffer by being kind."

"Please let us say no more about it."

"Oh, very well. I only wished to help

Anna. She is too proud, or too sensitive, to help herself. But I've had all that sort of thing knocked out of me by the War. The Bolsheviks have taught me what doesn't pay. Now, good night. I don't apologize for what I have said. I think I was quite right to say it. As far as I can see, only *you* can help Anna."

She crushed out the fire in her cigarette on an ash tray, finished her brandy and soda and went up to bed.

CHAPTER VI

"How sickening!" Derrick thought. He was lying awake in his bedroom turning over in his mind the events of the evening. The Baroness's request had irritated him intensely, because now, if he did what he had thought of doing, and offered to buy the Princess's pearls, it would seem as if the Baroness had prompted his action, as if he were obeying a sort of command given by her, or, at any rate, as if he were following up her suggestion. She would never believe that the idea had occurred to him before she had spoken. He told himself that it didn't matter what she believed or disbelieved. Nevertheless, his hostility to her made him hate the thought of appearing to have been guided by her in anything he did.

If only she had not spoken!

For one moment it occurred to him that possibly there was an understanding between the two women, that possibly the Princess

had known what the Baroness meant to do that night, had agreed to it, had even, perhaps, suggested it. But he dismissed this idea as unworthy, contemptible, one of those ugly night thoughts which are bred of insomnia. The two women were certainly friends, but their natures were not akin. One had a distinguished nature, bold, no doubt, but essentially refined; the other had an abominably coarse strain, trampled on the delicacies, derided them in her soul. He would not be so mad as to confuse the one with the other, the woman he had thought of as a possible life companion with the woman he frankly detested. His sense of values was too accurate for that.

In the morning, after an uneasy and unrefreshing sleep, he got up, resolved to do something definite in regard to the Princess that day, but undecided what that something would be.

During the morning he did not see her, but when he came in to *déjeuner* she was there with the Baroness, and greeted him in her usual cordial manner. Her preoccupation seemed to have gone, and she looked fresh

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and cheerful. As he stood by her table speaking to her he could scarcely believe that she was in such desperate straits for money. Certainly she had marvellous courage, a quality which he admired immensely.

"Katya was lucky last night," she said ;
"she says you brought her luck."

Derrick exchanged a glance with the Baroness.

"I didn't know I was a mascot," he remarked, rather dryly. "To tell the truth, the gambling here doesn't amuse me."

"The stakes are ridiculously low," said the Baroness, "but paupers are thankful for any small mercies. If we were at Monte Carlo——"

"Thank Heaven we are not !" interrupted the Princess. "You would gamble away your dresses and hats."

"And your pearls, perhaps !" said the Baroness.

Derrick's eyes rested on the pearls which the Princess was wearing, and he reddened slightly.

"Well, I shall see you after lunch," he said. And he went to his table.

While he ate he tried to decide what he was going to do. He glanced now and then towards the Princess, and wondered how it would be if they were husband and wife. He would soon get rid of the Baroness ; that was certain. He wondered, too, whether she was living on her friend's money or whether she paid her own way in the hotel. If she had nothing of her own she had had a personal reason for speaking as she had done on the previous night, and in helping the Princess he would be doing her a good turn. He wished she were not so detestable and that he could like her or, at any rate, pity her. But he could not do either. He could only wish her away.

The two women left the dining-room before he had finished. As the Princess's tall figure disappeared through the doorway he asked himself what he would feel if she were disappearing at the same time out of his life.

She would leave a great gap if he stayed on in Montreux. The place, he knew, would be almost unbearable to him now without her. But if he too went away ? If he travelled, or if he went back again to his old life in

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England—how would it be then ? Just how much did she mean to him ? He could not decide. Perhaps his uncertainty meant that she was not indispensable to him. Yet he hated to think of never seeing her again. A man of his age probably could not “fall in love” as young people do. But did he love the Princess ? He said to himself that it was ridiculous to be debating about such a thing, that the very fact of his doing so must mean that love was far from him. Nevertheless, he did not feel certain even of that. Indecision possessed him, and when he got up to leave the dining-room he did not know what he was going to do. All he knew was that he was firmly resolved to do something quite definite before another day dawned. He would draw the inspiration which would prompt him to action from the Princess herself.

The day was sunny and cold, and the lake was calm, and looked almost like silk in the pale gold of the sun-rays. He decided to suggest a walk on the curving path by the waterside which leads towards Vevey. Few people went there in winter, he knew, and in the afternoon there would probably be scarcely

anyone. He looked for the Princess in the public rooms, but did not find her. She had probably gone up to rest and read after luncheon. He sat down to wait, certain that she would come down before very long.

Soon after two o'clock she appeared in the hall dressed for walking, her pointed stick in her hand. He got up and joined her.

"If you are going for a walk may I come with you?"

"Yes, do."

"Where shall we go?"

"Anywhere you like."

He suggested the lake-side; she agreed and they started.

For a little while they walked in silence. Then they began to talk about nature, the various faint colours on the water, the effects of cloud and sunshine on the mountains, the differing beauties which come with the turning of the wheel of Time during the hours of a day. The Princess said that she loved best the frankness and boldness of noon; Derrick was for twilight.

"And in people?" she said.

"How do you mean, exactly?"

"Which do you like best in people, the noontide character, bold, direct, forcible, and, perhaps, rather shadowless, or the twilight nature, full of softness and shadows, of scarcely defined nuances and suggestions of the not fully revealed?"

He hesitated with his eyes upon her.

"I scarcely know," he said. "I'm not sure that I have ever thought about character in just that way. And you?"

"I like the noontide character. There is something in it I can grip and hold on to, something I feel safe with. That is why, on the whole, I like men better than women."

"Would you—would you ever marry again?"

He said it, almost blurted it out, abruptly before he knew his own intention. The words seemed to have come into his mouth without being impelled by any action of his mind. Without any change of expression the Princess replied :

"I consider that I have passed the age for marriage. I do not believe in middle-age marriages. There is little romance in them, and my experience tells me that marriage

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without romance is like wine that has been made thin by the addition of water. Besides, in any case, I think marriage a very dangerous experiment. Women, I suppose, have to make it if they get the chance, but if I were a man marriage would be the last thing I should undertake."

"I dare say you are right," said Derrick.

"Your condition shows me that you hold my opinion on that matter," she said, with a smile.

And she went on talking about all sorts of things.

Presently they came to the end of the path and turned to go back.

"To the eternal Montreux!" the Princess remarked.

"I wish—I wish you were free," said Derrick.

"My friend—so do I! It is terrible to have one's wings clipped if one has a nature like mine. I don't say I am an eagle, but really here I sometimes feel like one—in a cage."

"Would you—could you ever allow me to open the door?"

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"You! How?"

"It would be quite easy."

"I'm afraid not. I'm afraid it would be impossible."

"Indeed it wouldn't."

"But you know my strict principles about money. And only money can open the cage-door. So you see!"

"The quid pro quo makes everything quite right in such a matter, I think."

"The quid pro quo?"

"Yes. Why don't you sell those beautiful pearls of yours? Surely freedom is more to you than some strings of pretty things to hang round your neck?"

"Oh, as to that, I have long ceased to care for jewels."

"Then let me buy yours."

The Princess looked frankly surprised.

"You! But you are not a trafficker in such things," she said. "One has only to look at you to know that that sort of business is quite out of your line. Why, the mere thought of you dealing in jewels makes me smile."

And, indeed, she showed her splendid

strong teeth in a smile which seemed bordering on a fit of undisguised laughter.

"A lot of people are buying up jewels and other things in Switzerland in order to sell them at a profit elsewhere," said Derrick. "It's a very paying business. Jewels are fetching immense prices in Paris and London."

"Yes, that is true. No doubt if I were in the Rue de la Paix I could walk into a jeweller's shop and get a big price for my pearls. They would go to the wife of a war profiteer, one of the new guinea-pigs whom I hear of but seldom see—though a few come here from time to time."

"Forgive me—but—but have you ever tried to sell your pearls?"

"Yes, more than once. But the gentlemen to whom I applied, knowing I was a lady unaccustomed to such matters and in great difficulties for money, naturally tried to swindle me over the price. The pearls are worth at least twelve thousand pounds. I am willing to sell them for six thousand. But the gentlemen who come to Switzerland on business do not consider that to make a profit

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of some thousands on an outlay of six thousand is sufficient payment for their trouble."

"Princess!—let me give you six thousand," said Derrick, reddening. "You will be putting a large profit into my pocket. Isn't that a quid pro quo?"

"I am sure you are not in Montreux to make money, my friend."

"Nevertheless, I have some business instinct and, frankly, this affair appeals to it."

She looked full into his eyes.

"You would merely do it for my benefit."

"And pocket a lot of money into the bargain."

"That—by the way. Besides, you would have to smuggle the pearls out of Switzerland."

"That wouldn't be difficult. I should wear them. I don't think I am the type of man they would be likely to search at the douane."

The Princess broke into a laugh.

"No, indeed! You would never be suspected."

"Then will you agree?"

After a moment of silence she said, in a

different tone of voice, more earnest, more intimate :

"I don't like transactions of this sort between friends. And you and I are friends. It is true that I should be let out of my cage and that you—but I don't like the idea. There is something repugnant to me in taking money from you even in such a way as you suggest. Oh, this horrible war ! What situations it drives us into !"

"We must face them with common sense. My common sense tells me that when we can both profit by a very simple action we should be foolish to be held back from it by too great sensitiveness. And something else—certainly not common sense—tells me that I was led to come here for the very purpose of opening the door of your cage."

She turned her big black eyes on him—and now they looked deep and mysterious.

"It is strange," she said, "that the very first time I saw you I felt as if you had come to Montreux because of me. You never seemed to be really a stranger to me."

"If there is a purpose in destiny I think the important events in our lives must be

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planned. Are you a woman who would strive to interfere with the plan made for you ? ”

“ Such striving would be useless, of course,” she said.

And then they walked on in silence till they were in front of the garden of the Monney Hotel. There she stopped.

“ I will go in now,” she said, “ and have a long, quiet think. When I have to make an important decision I lie down on my sofa and give myself into the hands of the Fates. It is almost like giving oneself up to an anæsthetic—something about it which seems physical. It is a resigning of the will to the Guides. I have no idea at present whether I shall accept your suggestion or not. But some time this evening, or at latest to-morrow morning, I shall know. Now, au revoir.”

She gave him her hand, and pressed his warmly, even held it for a moment. In that moment Derrick felt inclined to say, “ Why not solve the question by marrying me ? ”

But he did not speak. For he realized that the Princess had, in effect, very cleverly

refused him when they were walking towards Vevey. If he made her refuse him more definitely there would probably be an end to all hope of helping her.

He watched her tall figure walking away from him and wondered whether he regretted her prejudice against middle-aged marriages or not.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN the Princess disappeared Derrick went to the post office and telegraphed to his broker in London, telling him to sell out six thousand pounds' worth of stock at once. Whatever the Princess decided—and he had no idea what her decision would be—he would be ready. After sending the telegram he went for a long walk to Villeneuve and beyond. He came back glowing with health, tingling from the strong winter air and pleasantly tired. It was dark, and on looking at his watch he found that it was just six o'clock. He longed to go up to the Princess's sitting-room and have a good tea in her company. But, of course, she had had tea long ago. Well, he would see her at dinner, and must manage to wait until then. But he was beginning to realize very thoroughly the delight of having a clever and sympathetic woman in his life. When they parted he would certainly miss her very much, even painfully, he thought.

Suddenly it struck him that if she decided to sell her pearls to him their parting would be hastened. For then, no doubt, she would leave Montreux, and he would have to go to Paris or London to get rid of the jewels.

And where would she go? He wondered. Often she had told him that she longed to leave Montreux, but she had never said where she wanted to go definitely. Or—had she? Yes, to be sure, she had spoken of Asia as if with absolute longing, had lamented that when she was rich she had been contented with the varnish and the ignorance of Europe. But even six thousand pounds wasn't such a very large sum. Such a woman, accustomed to luxury, couldn't travel for ever on a capital which would only produce some three hundred a year. And if she recklessly decided to treat the six thousand as income she would be facing an impossible future.

The fact that she had made up her mind not to marry again had proved to him that she was not a greedy woman. Otherwise, with her cleverness and decided physical attraction, to say nothing of her rather brusque, but very definite, personal charm, she could

easily shelter herself from poverty under the wing of a wealthy husband—under his wing, for instance. (Remembering her allusion to the eagle he could not help smiling.)

He entered the hotel, meeting its warmth with a strong sensation of cosy pleasure. Immediately the hall porter came towards him.

“If monsieur has not had tea yet, Madame the Princess begs him to go up and have it in her sitting-room.”

“Thank you. I’ll go at once,” said Derick, with unusual heartiness.

He left his coat and hat in the hall, and almost bounded up the stairs like a young man.

“This Swiss air is wonderful!” he said to himself. “By Jove! I am hungry!”

He tapped at the door on the second floor.

“Entrez!” said a firm voice.

He opened the door.

A strong smell of flowers greeted him. He saw violets in vases scattered about the small room. There were also carnations and roses. Books lay about almost everywhere, newspapers, magazines—he saw among others

the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, the *Hibbert Journal* and the *Round Table*. A big screen concealed the door into the bedroom. A round table with tea things was near it, and a large sofa, well supplied with big cushions, on which the Princess was lying in a dark blue dress smoking a cigarette.

"Ah, it is you at last! You have been for a long walk. I can see the air from the snows, the exercise, in your eyes. And I can see you are hungry, too. So you have not had tea, and all is well."

"But you——"

"No, I have waited—on the chance."

She pressed the bell, and an elderly woman came in from the bedroom carrying two plates covered with the cakes and pastries for which Montreux is famous.

"Bring us the tea and some toast, Marguerite," said the Princess in French. "All the English like toast."

"I know—I know!" said the maid, with a friendly smile at Derrick, "and to-day we have plenty of butter."

"Mon Dieu, how jolly!" said Derrick, mixing French and English in his enthusiasm.

When the maid had gone out of the room he added :

“ You are spoiling me to-day, but I’m bound to say I like it, and I feel as if it were doing me moral good.”

“ I think it is happiness which does us moral good. And I know that unhappiness, worries, great and persistent difficulties, the necessity for perpetual struggling, do us moral harm, whatever the dear teachers—European—of religion may say.”

“ Are you going to allow me to make you happier ? ” he asked.

He was standing looking down at her on her sofa.

“ I will tell you all about it when Marguerite has ministered to us.”

In two or three minutes Marguerite came with tea, perfectly made toast and a plate covered with pats of delicious pale yellow butter.

“ Now all is well ! ” said the Princess.

And she sat up, arranged the cushions at her back, and began to pour out the tea.

“ Help yourself to everything,” she said, as Marguerite left them alone.

"I will indeed, without ceremony," exclaimed Derrick.

"Oh, and here is jam!"

She stretched out her hand to a bureau, and brought out of it a large pot of strawberry jam.

"That's the finishing touch!" said Derrick. "Do you know you are making me feel very young?"

"So much the better! When I make people feel old I shall retire entirely from all worldly things."

"And now—I am waiting!"

"Well," she said, and her face changed, "I gave myself to the Guides."

"And what did they tell you? Or didn't they tell you anything?"

She was silent for so long a time that Derrick wondered. Her face looked stern and almost harsh in its immobility, and her black eyes gazed into vacancy. She seemed to be thinking profoundly, but there was no evidence of any mental struggle, or even of any mental indecision in her appearance. On the contrary, she looked strong and dominating, and perfectly self-possessed. At last she

spoke, without turning her eyes towards him.

“The Guides told me I had better accept your offer,” she said.

And there was a sombre and fatalistic sound in her voice, he thought.

“There is something I have to do, and I cannot do it here. But I dislike very much having this transaction with *you*.”

“Why ? ” he asked.

“I cannot tell you why. Do not ask me. Do not even wish me to tell you. But remember, whatever happens, that I had a real regard for you.”

“Had ! ” he said. “Is it in the past then ? ”

“Do not let us talk about it. The past, the present, the future—perhaps they are all one, though we do not feel it so. That may be one of the mysteries.”

Derrick felt for the moment chilled, almost frightened, as if a strange wave of cold went over and through him.

“I hope our friendship will never be a thing of the past,” he said. “It has meant, it means, a great deal to me.”

"You are a good fellow," said the Princess, "a thorough Englishman. Even your deficiencies, if I may call them so, do you credit. When I think of the cunning and meanness of others I admire them more than I can say. I respect them even. But——"

"But what? What were you going to say?"

"Nothing—nothing. Here are the pearls."

She lifted both her hands and carefully, with her delicate precision, she took the strings from her neck. The lustrous jewels gleamed almost like satin in the light as she moved them.

"Take them!" she said. "I must let them go to you, though I wish it had been to anyone else."

And she gave them to Derrick, who received them carefully.

"Wait a moment!" she added.

She got up, went into her bedroom, and came back with a dark blue case in her hands.

"Here is their home! Put them into it."

Derrick put the pearls into their bed of white velvet and shut up the case.

"I shall write you out a cheque for six

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thousand pounds to-night," he said diffidently.

A slight redness showed in the Princess's cheeks.

"This war has been an accursed thing for everybody," she said. "What it has destroyed! What it has destroyed! But now let us talk of other things!"

And suddenly she changed, seemed to force herself back to the woman he knew and fancied he understood, the woman of courage, distinction and fascination, full of mental vitality and interesting frankness.

That night Derrick wrote out a cheque for six thousand pounds and sent it up to her after she had gone to her rooms.

In a few minutes he received a note containing only these words:

"My friend, I thank you.

Your friend

"ANNA ARANENSKY."

He read it twice. Then he locked it away with the pearls.

CHAPTER VIII

THREE days passed and Derrick was still in Montreux and had done nothing about the pearls which were locked up in his dressing-case. He did not choose to hand them over to the director to be put in the hotel safe. The director might recognize the case as having belonged to the Princess. So they remained in Derrick's bedroom. Between the Princess and him they had not been mentioned again. The Baroness Hausen had said not a word about them, though, of course, she must know what had happened. Her manner towards Derrick had not changed, had not softened, though no doubt she thought that he had yielded to her suggestion out of compassion, because of the unfortunate situation in which she and the Princess were placed. Any gratitude seemed far from her. In fact, sometimes when Derrick met her cold blue eyes he found himself wondering whether the Princess could have kept the matter secret even from Katya.

But that was surely impossible. For the disappearance of the jewels—no longer worn by her friend—must have attracted the Baroness's attention and led to explanations.

The Princess also had at first shown no change in her manner. Always cordial, friendly, frank and outspoken, she had continued to be so—until the third day came. Then Derrick thought he noticed a distinct alteration in her demeanour. She seemed to him to be unusually restless, but to be trying to control or conceal it. Once or twice, when her eyes met his, he thought he saw in them a fleeting expression of almost hostile inquiry. And there were moments when he had a strong and mysterious sensation that her mind was trying to work in some strange way upon his, was trying to impose itself upon his mind, to plead with him or to compel him to do something. He had the feeling that the Princess was endeavouring to convey something to him which she did not choose to express in words. At first he did not know what it was, but on the fourth day after the pearls had come into his possession a physical restlessness, drawn, he believed, by him

from the Princess, brought him enlightenment.

He began to feel like a traveller who has lingered too long in one place, and who ought to go on his way, whether he really wishes to do so or not. And he felt that this feeling in him and the Princess's changed demeanour were caused by the fact that she wanted him to take the pearls away from the hotel, perhaps even from Montreux, that she was irritated with him for not having removed them, that she was trying subtly to convey this irritation to him, and thus to infect him with her own restlessness, without putting it into words.

He grew at last to be quite certain of this. And yet he did not leave Montreux. For something obstinate rose up and asserted itself in him, something that was part of his English manhood and that declined to bend to a woman. He thought, "Why should I go away until I choose to go for my own pleasure? I have made the Princess safe for a long time. That is all that need matter to her. As to my profit on the sale of the pearls I can take that when I please, or not take it

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at all. The pearls are mine, and if I decide to keep them that is my affair."

He did not mean to keep them, but he was in no great hurry to sell them. And he did not want to leave Montreux.

But as the days went by he was increasingly conscious of the Princess's secret restlessness, and of the steady effort which her mind was making to convey her restlessness to him. When they were talking together she sometimes dropped the conversation, as a tired hostess does when she wants to get rid of a visitor who has stayed too long in her drawing-room; she showed an increasing weariness of Montreux, an increasing cynicism in her outlook upon its society; she expressed more than once, and with a bitterness which reminded Derrick of the Baroness Hausen, her contempt for European ideals, European culture and tendencies of thought. He felt sure that her mind was turning towards Asia with more definite longing. He had put into her hands the means of escape from the cage; of course she must wish to use them.

But Montreux was not a cage to him,

though he knew he would not stay in it another day if the Princess left it.

She was free now ; she could go away if she chose. The fact that he remained in Montreux did not bind her to stay on there too. But he was resolved for the present not to go away. He liked his life at the Monney ; he valued his intercourse with the Princess. So he was obstinate and clung to his happiness. The fact that without his aid the Princess would have been obliged to remain on indefinitely in Montreux salved his conscience. Already he had risked deliberately losing his present happiness. He was surely unselfish enough. He need not make further sacrifices on the altar of friendship.

But his obstinacy in remaining was met, he believed, by an increasing, though unexpressed, determination on her part that he should go. He felt it underlying all their intercourse, and it angered him and distressed him. He never alluded to it. If he did so he felt that some change would have to be made. But he began to feel that there was a mysterious warfare between them which nevertheless had not broken their friendship.

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He believed that the Princess had a real regard for him, and that she esteemed him highly. He preferred her to all other women. And, nevertheless, they were at war, because he was defying her will, and she did not cease to exercise it in consequence of his defiance. He began to wish very much that she would be quite frank with him, would tell him exactly what she wanted him to do, would give him the reasons that prompted her desire. A man would probably have done that. But women, he supposed, being more mysterious than men, must act more subtly than men do. Possibly in their subtleties lay their attraction for men, and possibly they realized that, and therefore gave the rein to a natural impulse, knowing that wisdom guided them. But, he thought, it was sometimes damned hard on the men. In fact, it was damned hard on him now. He was beginning to suffer in this warfare which was not made natural by any strong, vigorous blows, but which was a complex matter of ambushes and traps and scouting expeditions in the dark. Their intercourse seemed to him daily more difficult. *Camaraderie* was

gradually wearing thin between them. There was no more ease and spontaneity in their conversations. At times he even felt that the Princess was growing hostile to him, though she never hinted at it in words.

He read hostility, he believed, occasionally in her long, expressive eyes turned on him in a swift, surreptitious glance, in a rigidity of her lips when they ceased from speaking, in the long, cold silence which followed and which he knew not how to break.

At last, unable to endure any longer the strange and almost spectral frost in which their friendship, once so warm and lively, was becoming enveloped, Derrick resolved to ask the Princess what was the matter, whether he had offended her in any way, whether she wished him to do something which he had not done, or to refrain from doing something which he had persisted in doing. If woman was mysterious it was surely the prerogative of man to be bold and uncompromising. He had not been that, but had lost himself in delicacies, and now found himself struggling in the midst of under-things which he could neither grasp with destructive hands nor even

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understand. It was time to put an end to a situation which he could no longer bear his part in with self-possession. Convinced of this, he acted with a promptitude and energy which surprised himself. He asked the Princess to allow him to come up to her sitting-room one night after dinner, and directly the door was shut behind him, he said :

“ You know why I wished to see you alone this evening.”

“ I don't think I do,” she said, with less than her usual complete naturalness and self-possession.

She was standing near the fireplace. He came up to her and stood by her side.

“ You are changing towards me. I want to know why. Have I done anything you dislike ? ”

With a sort of deep and sad irony she answered :

“ You have done a very dangerous, what you English call a very risky, thing. You have benefited me.”

“ Do you mean that my buying your pearls has made you dislike me ? ” said Derrick, with a cold feeling at his heart.

"Oh, no, my friend. I am not fallen so low as to be capable of quite such baseness. But—but—well, you may not understand—women's feelings are often so incomprehensible to men—but I hate now being in the same house with the pearls. Can you comprehend that? Why do you keep them? They are of no use to you. It was understood between us that you were to take them to London and sell them——"

"To London! But we never——"

"I wish you to sell them in London."

"But why?"

"I have information that they are paying much higher prices for jewels there than in Paris at the present time."

"You want me to go to London at once and get rid of the pearls?"

"They are a gêne between you and me here in this house. I have six thousand pounds, a little fortune for me, which makes me feel—oh, so rich! And you—you have some strings of things useless and ridiculous to you, things which you despise, as all true men despise jewels and wonder at women's passion for them. The inequality between us is too

great and makes me feel no longer at ease with you. I have the shame of the benefited. It is poor of me, but I cannot help it. Comrades must stand upon an equal footing. You and I no longer do this. I am on a lower step than you, and as I am not fond, I confess it, of looking up, I am in a false position. The pearls cry out to me from your room, ' You beggar on horseback ! ' ”

“ But, my dear friend——”

“ They do, they do ! I hear them day and night. I cannot rest for their voices. That is the truth.”

He had never before seen her show so much emotion, so much excitement. There was something akin to anger in her manner and voice, and for the first time he felt strongly the Russian in her, realized that beneath her good breeding, her distinction and *savoir faire*, there was something quite different, something almost barbaric, that he knew very little, perhaps nothing, about.

“ Do you understand me ? ” she asked.
“ Can you enter into my feelings ? ”

“ I think so—yes. But—if you feel like that I almost wonder that——”

He hesitated.

"What—what is it that you wonder?"

"Well, you are free now. You can go wherever you like. You told me you were sick of Montreux. Yet you stay on here when you could go away—away both from Montreux and the pearls."

"You wish me to go, and you are to stay!"

"I don't wish you to go," he exclaimed. "You know that. If you went I shouldn't remain on here for a day. No, but I wonder, if you feel as you say you do, why you stay on."

"And why do you stay?"

"You know quite well why."

She moved away from him and sat down.

"But London is not very far!" she said.

"You mean, I might easily go to London and come back?"

She said nothing, only sat still looking up at him.

"Suppose I did go to London and did come back?"

"Yes?"

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“Should I still find you here on my return ? ”

As he spoke he noticed that her strong face twitched slightly.

“Why should I—what makes you think—— ? ” she said, in a low voice.

“I don’t say I think you would be gone.”

“Then——”

“I scarcely know what I think.”

“Why should you suppose I would run away from you ? ”

“I don’t say that. Indeed, I can’t imagine you running away from anything or anyone. It is only the weak who do such a thing as that. And you are not a weak character.”

“Who knows ? ”

“I know.”

“You can sum up a woman, and a woman who is not of your nation ? ”

“I know you are not weak,” he said, with obstinacy.

“I am what the War has made me. That is what I am ! ” she said, with an extraordinary bitterness. “You do not know what I was, and you never will know.”

“And do I not know what you are ? ”

"No—not yet."

Suddenly Derrick thought of the Baroness Hausen. He did not know why. But he felt as if he saw her before him in the room, fair, good-looking, implacable, devoid, apparently, of all soft human feeling, incapable of belief in anything righteous, carrying her burden of nameless experience, desirous of terrible revenges upon the human brood.

"When you go away from here is the Baroness going with you?" he asked abruptly.

The Princess looked almost startled, and again her face twitched.

"Why should you ask that?"

"I'm going to be infernally rude. You must try to forgive me. But I—I detest the Baroness."

"Katya! What has she done to you?"

"Nothing, but I detest her, and hate to think of you with her. Will she go with you when you go?"

"I don't know what is going to become of Katya."

"Do you care for her?"

"I pity her."

"Do you care for her?"

"It is sometimes very difficult to know just what one feels."

"Yes; that's true!" he said, gazing at her.

He was remembering just then how he had debated within himself about the Princess, he was remembering that day on the path by the lake, when she had left him wondering whether she had stricken him by her clever evasion, or whether at the core he was still sound.

"But it's only with some, very few, people one feels like that," he added. "And I suppose it always means that a part of them, perhaps a great part, is hidden from you. You don't know of what nature that part is, whether you could be in sympathy with it or not if you knew it."

"You are stating what you are thinking about me."

Derrick reddened under her steady gaze.

"I know this, anyhow," he said, "that the reason why I have not gone away to get rid of the pearls is because I can't bring myself to separate from you. All these days I have felt that something in you was trying to push me away. But I was resolved not to go. If

you choose to go I can do nothing. But I don't intend to leave you while you stay here."

"There can be no happiness, no ease, in our friendship, while you still have the pearls," she said. "Get rid of them as soon as possible, but not here. I know how it is in Switzerland. Take them to London."

"Paris is nearer."

"I have told you my reason for wishing it to be London. I can say no more. If you do not choose to make the matter as decent for me as it can be made, if you do not choose to make the best of your bargain for yourself, and so to pour a little balm on my conscience, I cannot make you do it. You are a free man, and I quite realize a man with a will of your own. But, at any rate, if you really have any regard for me, get rid of the pearls. Till you do I sit here in your debt for six thousand pounds."

"Princess, I will go away and get rid of the pearls, if you won't make it unnecessary."

"How? How could I make it——"

"Marry me and take them back as my present to you."

There was a long silence between them.

It must surely be caused by some strong hesitation in her, and, therefore, it made Derrick hope. He knew now that he wished intensely to make this strange woman his; to pluck the heart out of her mystery, to conquer the obstinacies, the resistances, which he divined in her nature, to give her the peace of ordered and stable circumstances, to travel with her to the lands she desired. That there was a risk in what he wanted to do he realized, but now he was ready to take it. The only thing he felt he could not risk was going away in uncertainty as to whether he would ever see her again.

“Will you do that?” he said at last, as she did not speak.

She sighed heavily before she spoke. Then she answered :

“I wish I could do it, I wish I could.”

“Then do it! You are free.”

“If only you had never asked me! I never meant to allow you to ask me. But now it is done and can never be undone. All this comes too late.”

“What do you mean? Surely it is never too late for a little happiness?”

"You and I would not be happy together in that way. I know it. But now I——"

Suddenly she got up with an air of strong resolution, went to a writing table, unlocked a drawer in it, and lifted out a small dispatch box. Then she drew a little gold chain to which a key was attached from inside her dress, quickly opened the box and took out an envelope.

"Here is your cheque to me. Take it back. I do not wish to cash it."

"Princess!"

"No—no! Now you have asked me and I have refused, I cannot take it from you."

"I shall not take it back."

"Really you must."

"I shall not. If I can't be your husband, at least I can, and will, remain your friend. To-morrow I shall go away and take the pearls with me. I will go to London. I will get the biggest price possible, make my profit as large as I can for your sake. If I come back to you richer than I was before I wrote that cheque by some thousands of pounds I shall have been benefited by you. I shan't be like you. I shan't mind that. To be

in your debt will be happiness for me. I shall enjoy being on the lower step. And then, perhaps, I shall dare to ask you again. Now, good night ! ”

He turned quickly and went out of the room.

On the following day he started for London without obtaining from the Princess any absolute promise that she would remain on at Montreux till his return. But in their last interview he told her that he would soon come back, and that he expected to find her still there.

“ You have not done with me yet ! ” he said.

“ How do you know that ? ”

“ I can’t tell you now. But I do know it.”

“ I shall not dare to contradict you,” she said, with a faint smile.

At parting she gave him a long pressure of the hand, and followed him with her eyes as he went out of the room.

He did not see the Baroness Hausen to say good-bye.

CHAPTER IX

DERRICK arrived safely in Paris with the pearls, and put up at the Hôtel Crillon. On his arrival he telegraphed to the Princess as follows: "Am in Paris, may go to London to-morrow night. Best salutations. Au revoir. Derrick Merton." Then he locked up the pearls in a dispatch box and consigned the 'box to the safe of the hotel. This done, he had a bath, rested for a while, then got into evening dress, and went out to dine at the Ritz.

It chanced that at the Ritz he came across a man whom he knew very well, a fellow-member of one of his clubs, the 'Travellers', and a remarkably shrewd man of the world. This friend, whose name was George Cockayne, was staying at the hotel and dining alone. He suggested that Derrick should join him and that they should go to a theatre after dinner, and Derrick was very glad to agree. For he felt that he wanted company

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that night to distract his mind, which was inclined to fix itself with obstinate persistence upon the recent events at Montreux.

"Where do you come from, Merton?" said Cockayne, as they sat down among a crowd of Londoners and Americans.

Derrick told him.

"They tell me Switzerland's the most comfortable country in Europe to be in at the present time," said Cockayne. "First-rate food, moderate prices and very amusing company for those who aren't too particular."

Derrick confirmed the report as to the comfort, the food and the prices.

"And what about the company? They say all the cleverest rascals in Europe are living there like fighting cocks. Did you stay in Geneva, Lucerne or Zürich?"

"No, I've only been in Montreux."

"What sort of people did you meet there? Russians? Egyptians? Greeks? Levantine adventurers? The hotels are full of them, I'm told."

Derrick gave him a brief sketch of conditions at Montreux, so far as he had been able to study them.

"And what about the women?" continued Cockayne, who was reputed to have a remarkably varied and extensive knowledge of the feminine sex. "A regular jewel market, isn't it?"

"What do you mean exactly by a jewel market?"

"Well, that there are any amount of women over there whose jewels are displayed for sales on the sly. Fellows are perpetually slipping over from here to Switzerland and coming back with as many pearls and diamonds on them as the Shah of Persia, but well hidden, of course. The jewellers in the Rue de la Paix are giving damned good prices for jewels from Switzerland. Madame de Reval told me only yesterday——"

And he related a story of a woman, a lover, a deceived husband, jewels and a sale, very Parisian, and very much *du jour* in its after-the-War actuality.

"Women's expedients for getting hold of money are cleverer, more tricky, more damned ingenious than ever in these difficult days," said Cockayne. "Since the War the terrific rise in prices has obliged the adventuress to

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sharpen her wits, and find new ways of meeting the expenses necessitated by the art she lives for—the art of life. I can tell you one or two things——”

And he told them with the sly and cynical relish which was characteristic of him. For, though a very good-natured man, he was fond of pretending to an absolute disbelief in the inherent virtues claimed by some optimists for human nature, and he was extremely fond of good gossip, as almost all persistent frequenters of clubs are.

“Delicious! Wasn’t it?” he exclaimed, at the finish of an excellent story of successful deceit. “But poor—well, I suppose I mustn’t mention his name—has his eyes open now. He’s got rid of his dreams of innocent women. It’s wonderful, though, how guileless some men who live up to their necks in the world manage to be. Take Kit Vernon, for instance! You know him, don’t you?”

“Yes, slightly.”

“Well——”

And there followed another excellent story of a man hoodwinked and then browbeaten by a woman.

By this time Cockayne was ordering a second bottle of 1906 champagne, and was just getting into his stride. He had the art of being convivial without ever becoming objectionable, and had one of the toughest heads in London for the carrying of wine. He had been for over a fortnight in Paris, and was able to give Derrick a great deal of the inner social history of the last two or three months.

"But what about Switzerland?" he presently inquired again. "Isn't Montreux a small cosmopolis? Sometimes it's far more amusing to look at the animalcules in a drop of water than in a glass of water. One sees what they're up to more clearly. One isn't confused by too great numbers. Whom did you run across in Montreux?"

Derrick gave Cockayne a sketch of the Baroness Hausen, without mentioning her name. Cockayne listened with interest.

"I wonder what exactly she went through in Russia?" he observed. "It would be interesting to know that. One can guess, of course. And so she is one of the many whom the War has changed into something

less, or more, than what I call average human ! ”

“ More ! Well, I couldn’t agree with that,” said Derrick.

“ Well, as you describe her there’s something big and strong about her, something absolutely ruthless. That means character, will. You can have bowels of mercy without having an ounce of will.”

“ I frankly detested that young woman,” said Derrick.

“ But, then, you’re rather on the pounce for sympathy, aren’t you—I mean from women ? ”

“ Possibly. At any rate, I hate hard women.”

“ The War has made thousands of women as hard as nails. Your baroness was evidently one of the most finished specimens of the after-the-War female. Was she there alone ? ”

“ No, with—with another Russian, a friend.”

“ Same type ? ”

“ Good heavens—no ! ”

“ Well, I haven’t the honour——”

“ No, of course not ! ”

Derrick had not intended to speak to Cockayne about the Princess Aranensky, but now he changed his mind. He was not going to tell Cockayne her name, but it would be interesting to put the Princess before Cockayne, with her lights and her shadows, her frankness and her reticence, to sketch her in outline to him, and to hear what he would say of her. Whatever he said it would certainly not be foolish, and perhaps, by chance, it might throw a light into one or two places which still remained dark before Derrick's scrutiny. He gave himself to the task with an interest which grew as he developed his theme. By talking of the Princess thus to a man who had never seen her he seemed to make closer acquaintance with her. It was almost as if he read an analysis of someone whom till then he had known imperfectly. But he was himself the analyst.

Cockayne listened attentively.

"Sounds a curious and very interesting woman," he said, when presently Derrick was silent. "A Russian, you said. Was she from the Baltic Provinces too?"

"Oh, no."

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“ A Muscovite, perhaps ? ”

“ She never told me what part of Russia she was born in. But she formerly had large estates in Central Russia I believe.”

“ I should guess her to be a Muscovite from what you have told me, probably brought up and trained to the world abroad.”

“ What do you mean by trained to the world ? ”

“ Well, you have given me the impression that she is a past mistress of the art of the worldly life, just as in talking of the other woman, her friend, you gave me the strong impression of a character tainted by German blood.”

“ I felt that too. But in regard to the— well, let us call her the Muscovite, she always struck me as marvellously frank and open.”

“ My experience is that those apparently frank and open women are much the most dangerous.”

“ I could never think of her as a dangerous woman,” said Derrick rather stiffly.

“ Has she been hit by the War, do you know ? ”

“ I’m afraid she has.”

“A great many of these women in Switzerland are living on the proceeds of sales. I have heard a lot about them. They sell things piecemeal to people who go over from Paris and elsewhere. There are plenty of funny stories of those sales going about Paris.”

“Paris is always full of potins.”

“And never fuller than now. You see people are buying now who are not professional buyers but very often gentlemen on the make. They hear of these needy souls with no money but very often with valuable possessions, and they think it a good opportunity to try and make a bit for themselves. Sometimes they do make a bit ; but, on the other hand, sometimes they get very badly burnt from not knowing the business. As a rule, it’s a great mistake to launch out in anything you haven’t been properly trained to. Now, for instance, there was young Pierre de Montanvert——”

Another excellent story followed which lasted till dinner was over.

“Now where shall we go ? ” said Cockayne.

“Anywhere you like,” said Derrick.

Taking the line of least resistance they decided on the Folies Bergère.

That light-hearted place was crammed, but they got two seats near the stage and smoked their cigars in comfort. Between the parts they walked about in the promenade and the foyer, and watched all the latest absurdities. Derrick tried to be amused, but there was a latent heaviness at his heart. After the smallness, the intimacy, and not lonely peace of Montreux, Paris seemed almost intolerably crowded and noisy. He looked at the panorama of passing or lingering women, he listened to Cockayne's shrewd and cynical comments upon them, he felt the heat of pressed together humanity, he stared into the blaze of the lights, but he thought of the changing lights on the mountains round Montreux, of the white silence of the snows, of the cold pure breath of the world about Leysin, of the sound of a pointed stick striking on ice, and, with a sort of fear, he said to himself, "Am I really in love at my age?" Cockayne's keen comments began to depress him, almost to irritate him, for he felt himself at that moment to be a sentimentalist. and, therefore, inevitably out of touch with a man who prided himself on being guided by what he called common sense. He remem-

bered Cockayne's remark about the amazing guilelessness of some men who, nevertheless, had lived long in the world. Somehow, when it had been spoken, that remark had seemed to hit him. Yet it had certainly not been intended as an allusion to him. No doubt to a man of Cockayne's type anyone who believed thoroughly in a woman—so called of the world—seemed a guileless man, and probably an object of ridicule. It must surely make life like a very cold room to have such a keen insight into the insincerities of one's kind. And yet anything was better than to be a fool. Fortunately, there was a *via media*, not to mistake trickery for sincerity, but, on the other hand, not to imagine trickery and deceit where they were not present in a nature.

"I wonder what Cockayne really thought of the Princess as I sketched her out for him," thought Derrick, as they went back to their seats.

He resolved to ask him at the end of the performance.

They walked away from the theatre.

"Come in to the Ritz and smoke a last cigar," said Cockayne.

Derrick assented.

When they were in a quiet corner of the hotel, Cockayne said :

“By the way, where are you bound for now ? ”

Derrick hesitated before answering ;

“My plans are rather vague,” he said at last. “I shall stay a night or two in Paris. Possibly I may have to run over to London, possibly not. I expect to decide that to-morrow. In any case I don’t intend to stay in London, if I go there, for more than two or three days.”

“I shouldn’t go there at all if you can help it. The weather is simply infernal, and the journey—but you know all about that ; trains packed and late in arriving, the boat a seething mass of seasick humanity. I’m going on to Cap Martin. Why not come with me, if you haven’t made any special plans ? ”

“It’s awfully good of you. I must think things over. I’ve got to go back to Switzerland presently.”

“To have another look at the stony young woman from the Baltic Provinces ? ”

Derrick shook his head with a smile.

"What did you really make of the other woman whom I told you about?" he asked.

"It struck me that she was far the subtler of the two. But it's very difficult to judge anyone, especially a woman, by a description given of her, however good it is. In a woman a look—that she doesn't think you will see—often gives her away more than half a dozen actions or half a hundred words. What you told me about her opinion of Europe and her desire for Asia interested me. The key to a good deal in her character may be found in that, I should say. She may, perhaps, have some drops of Asiatic blood in her veins, which would make her more at home in Asia, if she ever goes there, than she is in Europe. But taking your description for what it's worth, I should say that she is the type of woman whom no pure-bred Englishman could ever understand. I should say, too, that she is infernally attractive."

"She is!" said Derrick, simply. "I've never been with a woman who was such a good companion."

"You didn't give me any definite impression of what the Americans would call her physical

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‘make-up.’ And that has a tremendous amount to do with what a woman really is.”

“I honestly don’t know anything about that side of her. But, remember, she’s well over forty.”

“Some of the women in London, and here in Paris, are well over sixty, and yet are by no means extinct volcanoes,” rejoined Cockayne, with his sly smile. “The women of our time last in the most extraordinary way. They stay the course long after they have passed the winning post. It is almost stupefying.”

“I don’t think she is at all that type,” said Derrick.

“My dear chap, I’m not attacking her ! You asked for my opinion, and I’ve been giving it to you, and trying to sound you for a little more to go upon. That’s all.”

“Of course, I know that.”

“Why not ask both your friends to Cap Martin ? Then I could study them at first hand.”

“I wonder if they would come,” said Derrick. “She says she is sick of varnish. And the Riviera is varnished till it glistens.”

"Perhaps the wilds of Asia are more in her line."

"Who knows? Besides, there's the money question. She ought to be careful, I expect."

"It's very difficult to get a Russian of that type to be careful with money. They are gamblers and spendthrifts by nature. They are as incapable of living without luxury as a fish is incapable of living out of water. And they are usually fatalists, which doesn't help matters. Has the lady any jewels?"

Derrick was startled by the question.

"Why—what makes you ask that?"

"Merely because perhaps a judicious sale might help her to join us at Cap Martin. Debinot is the best man in Paris for selling diamonds to. For selling pearls I should recommend Voirier and Company. Isidore Voirier is the best judge in Paris of what pearls are worth, and really an unusually honest man as things are at present. If he doubles when selling the price he gave when buying he is quite pleased with himself. The real screws are in London."

"Do you mean that it is easier to get a fair price for jewels in Paris just now than it is in London?"

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“ Much easier, according to my information. You might tell your Muscovite that.”

As he spoke Cockayne shot a penetrating glance from his grey eyes, which were surrounded by wrinkles, at Derrick. And the latter thought rather uneasily :

“ Can he have read my mind ? ”

They parted with an understanding that they would meet at lunch on the morrow.

CHAPTER X

THAT night Derrick made up his mind that he would not go to London. He hated the idea of travelling farther away from Montreux, and, after what Cockayne had told him, he felt sure he would gain nothing by taking the journey. Before lunch he would take the Princess's pearls to Voirier and Company, ask for Isidore Voirier, and see if he could bring off a satisfactory sale. And if he did bring it off—what then? The thought of Cap Martin came into his mind, of the pine trees, the smell of the sea, the golden sunshine. Were the snows better? It was good to walk among the pines in the early morning, or near to the twilight hour. He would persuade her to come there, not to be studied by Cockayne, but to be his companion. If she came out of the cage, owing to his action in opening the door, surely it was right that he should share her first days of freedom. She could hard'y refuse him that.

Next morning the waiter brought his breakfast up to his room, and he got up and put on his dressing-gown. When he woke he had been immediately conscious of an ugly feeling of acute mental depression. The day was foggy, and he was sure it was very dreary and cold outside. He wished he were in his room at the Monney. But if he sold the pearls that morning he could return to Montreux almost immediately. He sat down by the table and poured out his coffee. His mind still felt very disturbed, like the mind of a man who has to face some disagreeable event in the course of the day. He thought of Cockayne and the previous evening, and realized that the conversation with Cockayne had made an unpleasant impression upon him, which seemed to have grown greater mysteriously while he had been asleep. Cockayne, he now knew, had formed an unfavourable opinion of Princess Aranensky from his description of her. And yet he had certainly—or so he believed—displayed her as a fascinating and very delightful woman. But Cockayne, good-natured though he was, made a sort of profession of “seeing through” people. He

considered it due to himself to pierce through every veil, to carry every defence, and to find reason for his worldly distrust of humanity in every citadel which he inspected.

But Cockayne certainly had a sharp mind ; Derrick wondered whether he had made an accurate guess at the reason for his, Derrick's, presence in Paris. That was surely impossible ; and yet Cockayne had talked a good deal about jewels, and had even mentioned the best man to whom jewels might be disposed of in Paris. But that, no doubt, was merely a chance piece of information thrown out in the course of a conversation which had ranged over many subjects.

Why had Cockayne spoken of those " apparently " frank and open women as the most dangerous specimens of their sex ? And his mention of the look which a woman thinks a man will not see !

The remark had recalled to Derrick's mind the look which Princess Aranensky had given to Baroness Hausen one night at dinner at the Monney, swift, surreptitious—perhaps a warning look.

Derrick began to wish that he had not come

across Cockayne in Paris. But that could not be helped now. The worst of it was that something deep in himself seemed to be reluctantly assenting to certain of Cockayne's remarks about women prompted by the sketch given to him of Princess Aranensky. It must surely be so. Otherwise why should he be so disturbed by them now ?

When he had finished his breakfast Derrick dressed. Then he sent for a directory, looked up Voirier and Company, and found that they carried on business in a street close to the Rue de la Paix. Then he went downstairs and asked for his dispatch box to be given to him out of the safe. When he had received it he took it upstairs, opened it, and lifted out the pearls.

The morning was very dark. He turned on the electric light, opened the case and examined the pearls closely.

He knew practically nothing about jewels, but he thought that these looked very rare, very precious, fit to be worn by a woman like Princess Aranensky. He weighed the strings in his hand slowly and carefully, lifting his hand and letting it sink two or three times.

How long these pale delicate globes, beautifully graduated in size, had lain on the neck and bosom of the woman who had taken possession of his thoughts! Perhaps they were family jewels, or perhaps they had been given to her by a man who had loved her—by her dead husband, or by some lover. And now she had had to resign them—because of the War.

The War!

The electric light gleamed on the pearls, giving to them an exquisite lustre. As he looked at them, Derrick was able to understand, at least partially, women's passion for pearls. For they were subtle in their beauty, mysterious in their sheen, reticent in their appeal to the eyes. In their perfection they were not ostentatious. Perhaps among jewels they were really the aristocrats. He wondered how much the Princess had cared for these pearls which he weighed in his hand, how much she had suffered in giving them up. Perhaps she had not suffered at all. She had told him that she had ceased to care for such things. But that might have been merely a courageous lie.

And so the War had touched even her,

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had affected her life, more, had affected her nature. For she had said so with bitterness. He wondered what she had been before the War, and just how it had changed her ?

A knock at the door startled him. Hastily he dropped the pearls into their case and shut it. The waiter came in to clear away the breakfast.

A few minutes later Derrick went down, carrying the dispatch box, hailed a taxi and told the man to drive to Voirier's jewel shop.

"What can I do for you, sir ?" asked a middle-aged man, very smartly dressed in a perfectly fitting frock-coat and dark trousers, with a large diamond pin gleaming in his black satin cravat. "What can I show you ?"

"Nothing, thank you. I wish to see Monsieur Isidore Voirier. Is he in ?"

The middle-aged man cast a glance at Derrick's dispatch box, and looked rather dubious.

"I'm not quite sure, sir. I'm not certain whether he has arrived yet. Perhaps you could tell me what it is you wish to see him about."

Derrick hesitated a moment, and then said :

“ I believe Monsieur Voirier is an expert judge of jewels, especially of pearls.”

The middle-aged man smiled faintly.

“ Oh, yes, sir. Our Monsieur Isidore is considered quite the best judge of jewels in Paris.”

“ I wish to show him some pearls and to ask his advice about them.”

“ Ah—exactly ! Pray take a seat. I will go and see if Monsieur Isidore has arrived.”

Derrick sat down by a case in which pendants were displayed under glass, and held the dispatch box on his knees. Meanwhile the middle-aged man walked slowly away and disappeared through a doorway at the back of the shop. Exactly at the same moment a young man with beady black eyes entered the shop by another door sheeted with plate-glass, and stood in an indifferent attitude, looking vaguely in the direction of Derrick.

A long silence ensued. Derrick felt oddly uncomfortable, almost nervous. He supposed this was because he was totally unaccustomed to transact business in a jeweller's shop. He

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shifted the box on his knees, looked up, and saw the beady eyes of the young man fixed vaguely, yet, he thought, knowingly, upon it. The young man looked away and coughed faintly. A few more minutes passed. During them Derrick listened to the roar of the traffic of Paris, and stared at the gleaming pendants arranged on grey velvet.

At last the door at the back of the shop opened, and the middle-aged man reappeared.

"If you will come this way, sir, Monsieur Isidore will see you."

Derrick got up and followed him, holding the box tightly.

The middle-aged man showed him into a small, well-furnished room, in which stood a short man, totally bald, with a white, fat face, waxed black moustaches and large keen brown eyes.

"The gentleman, Monsieur Isidore," he said, and went out softly.

Monsieur Isidore bowed, looking hard at Derrick.

"I understand that you wish to consult me about some jewels, monsieur," he said, in French. "Pray sit down."

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Derrick sat down and put his box on a table beside him.

"I do. I have just come from Switzerland."

"Ah !"

Monsieur Isidore moved his bald head as he uttered this non-committal ejaculation.

"While there I came into possession of some very valuable pearls."

"Ah !"

"I believe you buy pearls ?"

"But certainly !"

"I—I bought these pearls."

"Ah !"

"With—with a view to selling them."

"At an advance. Exactly. We are continually getting jewels from Switzerland. And I suppose you wish me to buy your pearls if they are likely to suit my clientèle ?"

"Yes."

"Pray allow me to see them."

Derrick drew out his key, opened the dispatch box and took out the jewel-case. He was about to open it when Monsieur Isidore held out a fat, white hand.

"Allow me, monsieur !"

Very delicately, indeed almost tenderly, he took the case into his hand, carried it to a little table near a window, switched on two electric lamps, and sat down with his fat back turned to Derrick. Then he opened a drawer in the table and took out a lens. This done, he opened the case very gently and exposed the pearls to view, and looked at them for a moment as they lay gleaming softly in the light from the lamps. Finally, he fixed the lens in his right eye, picked up the pearls and closely examined them for two or three minutes, shifting the strings slowly through his cushioned white fingers.

Derrick sat still and looked at him, and again—he did not know why—felt nervous, rather as a man often does who is being examined in silence by a celebrated doctor.

At last Monsieur Isidore laid the pearls down, rather brusquely, took the lens from his eye, turned in his chair, and cast at Derrick a very peculiar glance, which seemed to be compounded of sharp inquiry and of menace.

“May I ask, monsieur, who sent you to me?” he said. “How you came to hear of my poor existence?”

"I was dining last night with a friend, a Monsieur Cockayne; he spoke of you."

"Monsieur Cockayne—I do not know him."

"He didn't say he knew you. He merely told me you were a fine judge of pearls."

"It is my business."

He paused.

"Did this Monsieur Cockayne know you had pearls to sell?"

"No. He simply mentioned your name in the course of general conversation."

"Ah!"

Monsieur Isidore was silent. He folded his fat hands together and looked down at them meditatively, as if he were considering very seriously what line he was going to take. Then, looking up again, he said:

"Pardon, monsieur, but do you tell me you personally bought these"—he negligently flicked the pearls with a forefinger without turning to see exactly where they lay—"these—ah—pearls?"

"Yes."

"May I venture to ask how much you paid for them?"

“ Six thousand pounds.”

“ Six thousand pounds ! ” He moved his bald head slowly up and down. “ Is it possible ? ” he concluded.

“ What do you mean by ‘ is it possible ? ’ ” said Derrick.

Monsieur Isidore twisted his nose sideways and slightly sniffed.

“ These pearls are false,” he said, sharply observing his visitor.

The blood rushed to Derrick’s forehead.

“ False ! ” he exclaimed, instinctively getting on to his feet.

“ They are imitation pearls, quite good ones of their kind. Unfortunately, Voirier and Company do not deal in artificial jewels, but only in real ones. So I cannot offer to buy these.”

Again he contemptuously flicked the pearls with his finger.

“ I will put them away for you,” he said, turning round.

“ Stop a minute, please ! ” said Derrick.

“ Yes ? ”

Derrick came up to the table and stood looking down on the pearls.

"I cannot—I simply cannot believe that you have not made a mistake," he said.

"I make a mistake about pearls!"

"Oh, I've no doubt you are a great expert, but even an expert——"

"My dear monsieur, if you like go round the corner, go all down the Rue de la Paix, show the pearls to Cartier, to anyone you please. The verdict will be the same as mine. These—pearls—are—false."

"But—but—I can't believe it."

"Why not? Since you come to me as an expert, why cannot you believe what I say?"

"Because—the circumstances in which I bought the pearls prohibit me from believing——"

He stopped.

"Do you mean to tell me that you paid six thousand pounds for them without having them valued?"

"I was told they were worth at least twelve thousand pounds."

"By whom? By the seller?"

Derrick was silent under the satirical gaze of the keen brown eyes.

“ Monsieur, I am sorry—may I say one feels your bona fides of the English gentleman—but you have been done. I may tell you that you are not the first. Others have been over to Switzerland lately and have burnt their fingers. May I hazard a guess? The person who sold you these things was a woman?”

Derrick said nothing. Monsieur Isidore smiled faintly, lifting his pointed moustaches.

“ Allow me to put up your property,” he said.

And he carelessly, almost contemptuously, shoved, rather than insinuated, the pearls into their case, snapped the cover down, and handed the case to Derrick.

“ Good-bye, monsieur!” he said, moving towards the door. “ I am really very sorry—very sorry indeed!”

He opened the door. Derrick put the case into his dispatch box, and turned to go out of the room. He felt sick, and had difficulty in walking steadily.

“ This way, monsieur!”

Monsieur Isidore opened the door into the shop.

The middle-aged man in the frock-coat and the young man with the beady eyes were both there, and both of them looked first at Derrick and then at the box as he came in.

“ Good-bye, monsieur ! ”

Monsieur Isidore spoke.

“ Good-bye,” said Derrick.

And he walked slowly down the shop and out into the traffic of Paris.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN Derrick was outside in the street and had walked a few steps he stood still and hesitated. He believed what Isidore Voirier had said about the pearls. The man was an expert, was perpetually judging the value of jewels. His manner had been that of one who knew what he was doing and who was almost contemptuously convinced of his own ability. When he had taken the pearls from Derrick he had taken them carefully, almost with a sort of reverence, like one receiving into his hands something very precious. But after he had examined them his manner had changed completely. He had shown the scorn he felt for pretences. When he had put the pearls back into the case he had handled them almost with disgust, as if it offended him to touch them, as if he were in a hurry to get rid of and forget them. He must know ; the pearls must be false.

And yet Derrick hesitated now, reluctant

to lose for ever a faith, perhaps an illusion, which he had cherished, which he wished still to cling to. He tried to tell himself that even an Isidore Voirier might make a mistake, that it would be foolish, wrong even, to take the word of one man as final in a matter of such tremendous importance. Experts do make mistakes. The cleverest man is not infallible. And when the honour of a woman, the faith and the happiness of a man, are at stake, it is surely madness not to take a second opinion ?

A passer-by, hurrying through the murk of the ghastly morning, knocked against Derrick, and passed on with a perfunctory "Pardon, m'sieu !" Derrick moved and slowly walked on till he came into the Rue de la Paix. There he stopped again, this time in front of a jeweller's window, in which a very few exquisite ornaments were displayed against a pale background of velvet.

He was trying to make up his mind to go into this shop and to test his fate once more.

He stood in front of the window, and pretended to be examining the jewels in it while he considered the matter. He still felt physically affected, almost as if his body had

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received a severe blow ; and his mind was not working normally. One of the ornaments in this shop shown to the passers-by was a small necklace of pearls with a diamond clasp and a pendant of diamonds and pearls. Derrick stared at it for a long time, trying to draw a comparison between these pearls and the pearls hidden in his dispatch box. Which looked the finer, the more precious ? He could not tell. But it seemed to him that if his pearls were displayed with cunning they would look quite as beautiful as the jewels he was now gazing at.

His pearls !

Yes, he must have another verdict. He pulled himself together and entered the shop.

Three well-dressed men were in it, one an old man with a long, very French face, the other two young with suave mouths and observant eyes. The old man at once took Derrick in hand.

“ What do you wish, m’sieu ? ”

“ Do you buy jewels ? ” asked Derrick.

The two young men looked suddenly intent.

“ Monsieur wishes not to buy, but to sell ? ” said the old man, with obvious surprise.

"I have some pearls which I wish to get rid of. They are of no use to me. But I have no idea of their value. It may be great or small. I should like to—to have your opinion upon the matter. If the jewels are of any great value I should like to dispose of them, if possible."

"Well, we do buy jewels, of course," said the old man, with a rather dubious, and even slightly suspicious manner. "But——"

"Is there anyone here who is an expert in jewels?" said Derrick, with sudden desperation, and feeling hot all over. "I want a judgment on my pearls."

He looked at the two young men, who were both gazing at him.

After a slight pause the old man said :

"Have you shown them to anyone else?"

"Yes; *Monsieur Isidore Voirier has seen them."

"Monsieur Isidore Voirier!" said the old man, with deep respect, and pursing up his thin lips.

He glanced round at his two subordinates, then again at Derrick.

"May I inquire what he thought of them?"

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“ If you will look at them, or get your expert—if you have one—to look at them, I will tell you afterwards Monsieur Voirier’s opinion.”

“ I am, perhaps, a fairly good judge of such things, though I should not certainly put myself on the level of Monsieur Isidore Voirier.”

“ Then please look at my pearls and give me your opinion of their value.”

“ Very well, monsieur.”

Derrick put his dispatch box on the counter. The two young men drew gently nearer. How he hated them at that moment ! He opened the box awkwardly, lifted out the case, opened it and pulled out the pearls. Then he said brusquely :

“ There they are ! Have a good look at them ! ”

“ Monsieur will not mind if I take them away for a moment ? ”

“ Certainly not. Of course not.”

The old man took the pearls up in his yellowish, long-nailed hands, went away to a table set against the back wall of the shop, turned on an electric light, opened a drawer,

and probably drew out a lens. (But Derrick could not see exactly what he was doing.) Then he sat down, and there was a pause. Presently he looked round, made an odd noise in his throat, got up, turned out the light, laid something down on the table, and came back with the pearls in his hand.

“Well—well?” said Derrick.

“I could not tell you the exact value of these, m’sieu,” he said. “But they are very good imitation pearls, as no doubt Monsieur Isidore Voirier told you, very good imitations indeed. I cannot remember that I have ever seen better. We do not, of course, buy imitation jewels. It is not in our line.”

“No. Thank you very much. I am very much obliged to you.”

“If you want the name of a man who buys things of this sort——”

“No, thank you. No!”

The case was shut with a click. Another click, and the dispatch box was shut.

“Good morning.”

“Good morning, m’sieu! Allow me!”

The shop door was opened, and Derrick was once more on the pavement.

This time he did not hesitate, but walked away at once in the direction of the Hotel Crillon.

When he got there it was twelve o'clock, and he remembered that he was due at half-past twelve at the Ritz Hotel, where Cockayne was to lunch with him as his guest in the restaurant. He put the dispatch box on a table. There was no need now to consign it to the safe of the hotel. In fact, there never had been any need for such a precaution. Then he sat down in an arm-chair and tried to sum things up.

He had been "done," swindled grossly. There was no longer any room for doubt about that. In his own eyes he was now ridiculous, contemptible—and tragic.

"Moral riff-raff!" Where had he heard that phrase? He tried dully to remember. Ah, yes—*she* had said it! Moral riff-raff! And that was just what she was. Dully he wondered about her. Even now he was not able to think of her as a clever adventuress. When he thought of her, when he remembered things about her, her look, her manner, her ways, her conversation, he felt that she was a

distinguished woman, a thorough lady, an aristocrat through and through.

And yet she had deliberately swindled him out of six thousand pounds.

The fact seemed incredible.

He remembered his conversation with the director of the Monney Hotel. That conversation, perhaps, should have warned him, should have put him on the *qui vive*.

Then he thought of the Baroness Hausen. What rôle had she played in all this affair? It was she who had prompted him in the matter of the jewels. Had she, perhaps, also prompted Princess Aranensky? Could the Princess have conceived such a plan without an evil genius at her elbow to suggest it to her as a way out of her difficulties? And yet she still seemed to Derrick to be the dominating spirit in that alliance of two women.

He looked at his watch. If he were going to the Ritz it was time to be off. He did not feel fit to go anywhere or to be with anyone. And yet loneliness was utterly hateful to him at that moment. For never had he felt more dreadfully alone than he did now.

After a moment's debate he resolved that

he would pull himself together and go to the Ritz.

While he was going there it occurred to him that probably the cheque he had given to the Princess had not been passed through the bank and that by sending a telegram to London he might be able to stop it. The Princess had certainly not been in a hurry to cash it, because when he had definitely proposed to her and she had refused him she had taken the cheque from a locked drawer and had offered to give it back to him. So there might still be time.

He called out to the taxi-cab driver and told him to drive to the nearest post office.

“ Bien, m’sieu,” said the man.

In two or three minutes he drew up beside the kerb.

“ V’là, m’sieu ! ”

Derrick got out of the cab and went slowly into the post office. It was very full of people, and he could not immediately get hold of a telegraph-form and a pen or pencil. So he stood and waited. He looked at the muddle of people, at the dingy room, and then at his watch. It was close upon half-past twelve.

If he did not hurry to the Ritz he would be late. He knew Cockayne well, and, no doubt, Cockayne would not mind waiting for a few minutes. Still, when you are the host it is impolite to keep a guest waiting. Derrick decided to send the telegram later. After luncheon would do. That would only mean a delay of an hour and a half or so. He turned, went out of the post office, got into the cab and drove to the Ritz.

Cockayne was in the hall, and they went in immediately to lunch. After a little talk Cockayne asked Derrick whether he had decided on his plans for the immediate future, and whether, and if so when, he was going to London.

"I've decided to follow your advice and give up the journey to England," he said. "My business there isn't very important and can be put off."

"Good! Then what about Cap Martin? Why don't you come there with me? We'll go to Marseilles, stay a couple of days, lunch and dine at La Réserve and take a dip into the extraordinary life of rascality there. They tell me Marseilles of after the War is a phe-

nomenon. Crooks of all the nations of the world gathered together to fleece the travellers who are perpetually held up by strikes and can't get away by sea ; yellow men by the hundred ; Spahis on the loose ; Arab chieftains decorated up to the eyes having the time of their lives in the redecorated hotels ; South Americans bursting with money who've come over to burn it in exhausted Europe. A man I met here yesterday said to me, ' Whatever you do have a good look at Marseilles. You'd learn more about human nature in a couple of days there than you would in as many months anywhere else.' "

" I—I don't know whether I'm keen on learning anything more about human nature," said Derrick.

" Had enough of it ? " asked Cockayne, with a keen glance.

" It isn't very profitable, is it ? "

" Depends what you want out of it. If you're out for amusement you'll get it."

" And if you're out for a little bit of sincerity you damned well won't get it ! " said Derrick, bitterly. " It's all very well to talk about amusement. But some of us get tired

of staring perpetually at a satiric comedy ; and that's what life is. Some of us were fools enough to think the War would make a difference——”

“ Well, so it has ! ” interjected Cockayne.

“ A difference the wrong way ! Yes, that's it ! Human beings are more disgusting than ever now.”

“ My dear fellow, you want too much.”

“ Perhaps I do ! Well, never mind. I'll come with you to Marseilles, Cap Martin, anywhere you like. But I'm afraid I shan't be very good company.”

Moved by a sudden and overwhelming impulse Derrick leaned forward over the table, and added in a low voice :

“ I've had a facer, Cockayne, a terrific facer ! ”

“ My dear chap, I'm sorry. Can I help ? ”

“ No. I was a fool, no doubt. I mixed up friendship, affection, with business.”

“ And you've been done ? ”

“ Done to a turn ! ”

“ I'm awfully sorry.”

“ And even now——”

He pulled up short.

"Talking won't mend it!" he said. "I must try to forget it. It's this cursed War which has brought the whole thing about. People prate about moral regeneration coming out of the War. I see only moral degeneration coming out of it—nothing else."

"You must give people time to settle down," said Cockayne, with a sudden unusual earnestness. "We've all had a shake. And after a shake one's not wholly normal. I forgive people a lot just now."

"Do you?"

"So many of them have fallen into holes and don't know how to struggle out of them. There's a heap of help wanted."

"If people would only let one know the exact truth, instead of always telling lies, it would be more satisfactory helping them."

"Half the time they're afraid."

"What of?"

"They are afraid to trust to the goodness in others."

"I thought you had no faith in human nature, that you didn't believe in it."

"My dear fellow, one believes in a lot more

than one confesses to. Irony is one's defensive armour. That's all ! ”

When lunch was over, Derrick said :

“ Let us leave Paris to-night if you have nothing special to do here. I feel I shall be better out of it.”

“ I can go to-night.”

“ That's good. And now if you don't mind I'll be off. I've got one or two things to do.”

Derrick still thought he meant to go to a post office and send off a telegram to London. He could have sent a telegram from the Ritz, of course, but somehow he didn't care to do that. An acute reserve governed him. At the Ritz he was known. At a public office he wouldn't be known.

But when he was out of the hotel, although he passed more than one post office he did not send any telegram. Each time he was on the point of entering through the swing doors he was held back by an invincible reluctance. He said to himself, “ Suppose she did not know that the pearls were false ! Suppose she acted in good faith ! ” That was, he knew, unlikely, even almost impossible. He could not really believe it to be possible. And yet—there was

just the chance. By some extraordinary combination of circumstances she herself might have been deceived about the nature of the pearls. If he sent the telegram, she might be reduced to penury. She might be turned out of the Monney Hotel. When he thought of that he simply couldn't telegraph to the bank. And he went back to the Crillon without doing so.

In the evening he and Cockayne started for Marseilles.

They managed to get two places in the sleeping-car, but Derrick could not sleep. He lay awake all night listening to the roar of the train and thinking of the immediate past and of his tragic situation. For he now realized how deeply he had come to care for the Princess, how sincerely he had admired her, and how intensely he had been looking forward to seeing her again. Although she had definitely refused him, Derrick had certainly not lost the hope of persuading her to change her mind. He had, then, come to believe that she genuinely cared for him, valued his company, found him more sympathetic to her than others were. She had hurt him in his pocket,

but that was as nothing to the injury she had inflicted upon him in his heart. Over and over in his mind he turned all the facts of his short friendship with her, trying to decide whether from the first she had marked him down as a possible prey, or whether she had been driven by circumstances, unwillingly to do what she had done, hating herself for the doing of it, or whether she had been tempted, or somehow driven to do it by the abominable influence of Baroness Hausen, a woman, perhaps, with a German soul housed in her technically Russian body. And in this painful mental debate he tried to be scrupulously fair. (He now felt sure that she could not have been deceived about the pearls.)

Some very disagreeable facts came up in his memory. For instance, he remembered that the very first time he had met the Princess it had seemed to him as if her mind had said to his mind, "So! It is at Montreux that you and I had to meet. I could not go to England to you, so you have come to Switzerland to me!" Did that mean that at a first glance she had "spotted" him as a likely victim? If so, she had probably gone up to Caux on the

day when they had lunched together there with the deliberate intention of becoming acquainted with him. She might have found out that he had started to walk up there, and have followed him by train with the object of catching him alone.

It was an intolerable supposition, and he tried to put it from him. Yet how could he be sure that it was not so ? At the concert on the previous night, when the Princess had turned round after Litvinne's singing of "*Les Roses d'Ispahan*," he had felt quite definitely that she intended to know him. Why ? He could no longer imagine that it was for the sake of his *beaux yeux*.

There were other things, too, which he remembered with a now painful distinctness.

She had spoken to him of her belief in human kindness and, looking at him fixedly, had said, "People have told me that there is much of it in England." At the time he had felt pleased and warmed by that statement, but now it occurred to him that the thought in her mind at that moment might very well have been, "Here, perhaps, is an English fool ready to my hand." And her apparent dis-

interestedness, her refusals to allow him ever to pay trifling sums for her—all those might have been handfuls of dust thrown in his eyes with the subtle purpose of effectually blinding him, so that he might never suspect her real character, her unyielding and coldly pursued purpose.

But she might have married him, have sheltered herself from all poverty for the rest of her life! She had known that he was rich. Why then had she refused him? An adventurer would surely have jumped at the chance he had offered her.

At Leysin she had told him that in her opinion the War had affected the morals of men and women for the worse, and had alluded to the almost universal excuse of "shell-shock" put forth by those who did what they knew to be detestable.

"I should use it myself, I know, if necessary," she had added. "And—perhaps there is really something in it." And then she had shot at him one of those subtle looks which even then had obscurely troubled him, and which he had never been able to understand. Had she been pardoning herself then

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for what she intended to do to him in the future ?

“There is nothing which a human being might not do if sufficient occasion arose.”

That was another saying of hers which to Derrick now seemed terribly significant. And he repeated to himself in the night her fatalistic remark when he had questioned her—or half hinted a question to her—as to Baroness Hausen’s influence upon her—“It is not the Katyas who really influence us, my friend. It is the terrible *Zeitgeist* ; it is the Spirit of the Time.”

Then the night when the Princess had asked him to take the Baroness to the Casino ! On that night the Baroness had begged him to help the Princess by buying her pearls. Her mission to Geneva that day had failed. Why ? Probably the Princess had really shrunk from trying to palm the false jewels off upon him, and had made a genuine effort to swindle some other, unknown person. The effort had proved abortive. Perhaps the other man had been too sharp. He would never know about that. But he now felt certain that on that night the Princess had finally decided if possible to make

him her victim, and had contrived that the Baroness should be alone with him in order that she might prepare the ground.

In the early morning, summing the whole matter up to himself as well as he was able in his miserable condition of mind, Derrick came to the conclusion that Princess Aranensky had been at her wits' end for money when he first met her, that she had thought of him as a man from whom possibly she might obtain help, that she had really grown to like him as their intercourse had developed, that she had struggled against the pernicious temptation to try and swindle him, that she had attempted to get rid of the pearls at Geneva, and that, having failed in that attempt, she had at last been driven by the pressure of necessity to do what she had done, hating herself for the doing of it. But why she had refused to marry him, and why she had—surely deliberately—given him the definite impression that she would never accept a gift of money from him he could not understand. Surely it would have been less detestable to the pride of an aristocratic woman to take money from him as a gift than to steal it from him by a deception !

But six thousand pounds ! That was a big sum. He would, certainly, never have offered to give her so much. She had known that, of course. So, perhaps, she had decided to play only for high stakes. That was possible. The marriage question he could not resolve—unless——

Suddenly it occurred to Derrick that there might be another man in the case. And he burned with jealousy at the thought. Yes, even now, after what had happened, he could be jealous of the Princess. That was sheer madness. Yet he writhed on his narrow bed. Why had she lingered on in Montreux when the door of the cage was open ? Why had she evidently been determined that he should leave the place before she did ? Why had she wished him to travel as far as London to get rid of the pearls, instead of trying to dispose of them in Paris ?

Paris was nearer to Montreux than London. He wished that he were in a train rushing to Switzerland instead of in the Paris and Marseilles *rapide*. In Paris he had never contemplated trying to see the Princess again after he had learnt that the pearls were false. But now

a strong desire leapt up in him to go back and confront her, and have it out with her, force from her the whole truth of the matter. She could not refuse him the truth. He would find means to compel her to tell it to him.

"What's the time? Have you got the time?" said a muffled voice above him.

Derrick looked at his wrist-watch.

"Ten minutes past six," he called out.

"Seven?"

"No, six."

"Thank God—time for some more sleep."

And he heard Cockayne turn over in the berth overhead.

The train was nearly two hours late in reaching Marseilles. Cockayne had telegraphed from Paris to the Hôtel du Louvre et de la Paix asking for rooms to be reserved for them, but when they arrived at the hotel it was crammed, and the manager told them that he could do nothing for them. There was a big ship due to sail for India that day, but she had not arrived in the port yet, and there was reason to suppose that her departure for the East would be delayed, probably for two

or three days. Meanwhile some scores of travellers were waiting for her in Marseilles.

“ Our last two rooms were taken only last night by a lady and gentleman who are sailing on the *Ophir*, monsieur. I’m very sorry. I should advise you to try at the Hôtel de Noailles. It has recently been redecorated from top to bottom, and is the best hotel in the town, except ours ! ”

They went to the Noailles and got rooms.

Meanwhile Derrick had made up his mind that instead of going with Cockayne to Cap Martin he would return to Montreux and see the Princess again. He dreaded seeing her. He knew that their meeting could only be a horrible one, but something irresistible drew him back to Switzerland and to her. Perhaps it was something in the heart which he did not comprehend ; or, perhaps, it was something in the brain, the insatiable curiosity of man who is driven by the deep desire to understand, to unravel hidden motives, to discover the springs of actions which have affected, which continue to affect, his happiness. Derrick said nothing of all this to Cockayne. He did not mean to leave Marseilles immediately.

He would stay with Cockayne till the latter went on to the Riviera. In those two or three days he would have time to consider how he intended to act when he met the Princess; he would have time also for a little rest, which he felt that he needed badly after the travelling and the mental turmoil of the preceding days.

That day Cockayne and he drove over to the Corniche and lunched at the restaurant of La Réserve which overlooks the sea. Then they took a long walk along the coast and returned to Marseilles on foot. On arriving at their hotel they heard casually that the *Ophir* had just arrived in the harbour.

CHAPTER XII

ON the following day Derrick asked Cockayne how long he intended to stay in Marseilles.

"Well, what do you say?" his friend asked. "This hotel isn't bad, and I find the place very amusing. I've known Marseilles for more years than I can count, but I've never known it like this. Last night, after dinner, when you'd gone up to bed, I wandered about for over two hours and took a bird's-eye view of the after-the-War conditions here."

"I hope you were satisfied?"

"My dear chap, I received education. And that's what we are here for."

"In Marseilles do you mean?"

"No, in this life. I propose to get a little more education here if you have no objection?"

"Not the least in the world."

There was a silence. Then Cockayne said, "Perhaps you are longing for the pine woods of Cap Martin?"

"Well—no. To tell you the truth I think

I shall have to make some change in my plans. I believe I shall have to go back from here to Montreux."

"You are going to fetch your friends?"

"My friends?"

"The Russian princess and the baroness from the Baltic Provinces about whom you talked to me."

"Oh no! They won't be coming to Cap Martin."

Cockayne lit a cigarette.

"You'll come on there from Montreux?" he said, carelessly.

"I really don't know. I—I don't want to let you down after promising to come. But my plans have all been—I mean that—well, Cockayne, something happened in Paris which has thrown me out of gear."

"Of course. I knew that. I only wish I could do something, help you in some way. But I suppose that's impossible?"

"It's good of you. You're a good friend. But you can't do anything. The thing's done, and unluckily it's irreparable."

"Then take a strong pull on yourself. Put it behind you. Forget it."

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“ I can't do that yet. Some day, perhaps—but not yet.”

“ I don't want to be curious, but do you think that going back to Montreux will help you to forget it ? ”

“ I don't say that. But I feel I must go.”

“ Then there's no more to be said. I shall be awfully sorry to lose your company, but that's a mere detail. I dare say you want to be off at once ? ”

Derrick hesitated. Then he said :

“ No. I suppose you'll only be here for a couple of days or so ? ”

“ Something like that.”

“ Well, I'll go when you do. I think that's the best arrangement.”

“ Right ! And, my dear fellow, remember that there are very few things in life which leave a permanent wound, and that mere scars may look ugly but they don't hurt us, even when the weather changes. We 'get over' practically everything that doesn't send us into the grave straight away. Nature is very accommodating.”

“ Oh, this thing won't break me. I'm not afraid of that. But—well, it's no use talking

about it. To tell the truth, what I really fear is losing all faith in human nature. That dries a man up. I dare say you think me a fearful sentimentalist at my age talking like this. But I expect a great many people are thinking as I am just now. The War's been a bad shock, but some of us have looked forward to a finer humanity coming out of it. If, on the contrary, we find humanity the worse for the War, what on earth have we to live for? You are studying Marseilles. You find it changed. Is the change for the better?"

"Good heavens, no!"

"And you are amused?"

"Interested at any rate."

"I'm the type that gets disgusted, I'm afraid."

"I've a rough philosophy that helps me a lot."

"What is it?"

"Hold on to the best in yourself and let all the rest go hang."

Derrick stood still for a moment. Then he shook his friend's hand.

"I'll go out and think that over," he said.

He went out and took a long walk through the crowded streets of Marseilles. Finally, he went down to the harbour and strolled by the edge of the sea. The day was fine and the sun was out. Numbers of ships big and small were lying at anchor. People were putting off for the Château d'If. Fishermen were coming ashore brown and hairy, and smelling of the salty waters. Conjurers were performing in the midst of small circles of the curious. A humpbacked dwarf and a woman in tights were doing acrobatic feats. And everywhere rough men of all nations, the hardy travellers and adventurers of the world, were taking their ease in the sunshine, lounging along the water's edge, pipe in mouth, sitting in groups before the shabby cafés, playing cards, drinking soup or mysterious liquids, swearing, spitting, quarrelling, larking. Among them were many yellow men with melancholy eyes, small-boned limbs and thin faces; there were Arabs too, Negroes, Kabyles, Sudanese. Half the nations of the earth seemed to be assembled in this port of France. Derrick felt vaguely detached and almost confused as he made his way slowly through the throng.

“ Hold on to the best in yourself and let all the rest go hang ! ”

What else, after all, could one do ? It was absurd to concern oneself about the myriads of men, to bother about them collectively. How, indeed, could one ever be sure whether in the mass they were deteriorating, or progressing, however slowly and almost imperceptibly, upon the upward path ?

Some Lascars went by. Derrick thought of the *Ophir*, that great ship bound for the Far East for which so many travellers had been waiting.

He wondered where she was berthed and thought he would like to have a look at her. Why was that ? He wondered for a moment what could have given rise to such a desire in him. And then he remembered the Princess's allusions to Asia. She had wished to go to India and had expressed her wish to him more than once. The *Ophir* to-morrow, or the next day, very soon at any rate, would slip out on the high road to the land *she* must often have dreamed about, or perhaps brooded over, in those rooms furnished with cushions in Montreux.

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A sturdy seafaring man, evidently British, came towards Derrick, pipe in mouth, hands in pockets.

"Good day! Can you tell me where the *Ophir* is berthed?" Derrick said, going up to him.

"Keep straight on, go to the right, and you'll find her about a hundred yards before you come to the quay the Algiers boats clear from."

"Thank you. When does she sail?"

"Noon to-morrow."

The sailor walked on, rolling slightly in his gait, and Derrick continued on his way.

He had a good look at the *Ophir*. She was a great ship and seemed in good trim. The gang-plank was down to the quay. Some sailors and Lascars were moving about on the decks. A man with bare arms was polishing the glasses of portholes with a handful of grimy rags. A young officer paced to and fro on the bridge, looking warily this way and that. But no passengers were visible. Probably they had all gone ashore. And those who had been awaiting the arrival of the *Ophir* in Marseilles

had not come aboard yet. Derrick stared at the gang-plank and thought of Princess Arenensky. So many things made his thoughts go to her ! He remembered their talk about Asia, and her words, " I often feel Asia within me." They had been in the snow together when she had said that. The day was declining, the mists were coming down and the light was fading about them. It was their first conversation together, continued after the lunch at the cold little hotel. And she had spoken of Doctor Steiner and of the mask beneath which all realities are concealed from men. She had said that as the real physiognomy of the world is hidden behind the mountains and seas, the desert sands and the sunsets, so men and women are hidden behind their words and their actions.

But was that true ? Had not the Princess revealed herself, stripped her character bare, and shown it naked to him by her action when she sold him false pearls as real ones ? Or was the real woman still hidden from him, with all the true lights and the shadows ? He had thought her sincere and had cared for her. Now he believed her false—and—yes—he still

cared for her against his judgment, his will. But though he believed her to have been false to him, did he know her whole and complete, just as she was ? He did not. And that was why he would go to Montreux and try to see her again. He would not come upon her as a judge. He would come upon her as a man who knew the worst of her, and who would demand to know the rest. Something told him that he had not yet discovered what was the mainspring of her detestable action. She had needed money. Yes. But that was not the whole explanation of her conduct. He wondered about her religious views. They were strange. He was sure of that. He wondered about her physical life, remembering a question of Cockayne's. And he gazed vaguely at the great ship.

A young Englishman came up behind him and said :

“ Are you sailing with us, sir ? ”

Derrick started and turned.

“ No ! ” he said, looking hard at the man.

“ I thought you might be as you were taking such a long look at the ship.”

"No. Are you one of the crew?"

"I'm a steward, sir. I've been on leave in the town."

"Have a cigarette?"

"Thank you, sir."

"I rather wish I were coming with you. Is your passenger list full?"

"Jam full, sir. The last really good cabin was taken by telegram only a couple of days ago, I heard say. We've got a princess coming aboard."

"A princess!" said Derrick.

"Oh, not a British princess, sir, nothing of that kind. This one's a Russian, I believe. Anyhow, I know I'm going to look after her with the stewardess."

"Oh—a Russian princess!" said Derrick.

For a moment he stood quite still. He glanced almost furtively at the man and looked away again. It was, surely, very unlikely very improbable, and yet—it was possible, Yes, it was horribly possible!

A pulse in his forehead beat violently, and he felt as if a wave of hot blood flooded his brain, submerged it for a moment, drowning his power of thought.

The steward, a young, quick-witted man, looked at him almost inquisitively.

"Those Russians, I believe, breed more princesses than we do, as I may say, sir, but they seem to be giving them toke over there—the Bolshies, I mean. So I s'pose them as can are clearing out of the country."

"No doubt. And what is this princess's name?"

"That's more than I can tell you, sir. It's down on the list, but I haven't troubled to read it. Only I was told as I was going to attend on her."

"Ah! Well, I must be off. Good day!"

"Good day, sir."

Derrick walked away for a few steps, then abruptly turned; the steward was still there, and had evidently been looking after him. Derrick came back and put his hand in his pocket.

"Look here!" he said. "I suppose it isn't against rules for you to tell me the name of a passenger on board of your ship? Go and find out for me the name of the princess who is sailing with you to-morrow, and here's——" He stopped short.

The young officer on the bridge was observing him.

“I’ll walk straight on along the quay. Come and tell me the name, and I’ll give you fifty francs.”

And he walked slowly away down the quay till he was out of sight of the *Ophir*. Then he stood still and waited. The fellow had not answered, had not said he would come, but it was worth while to wait. If he did not come—well, then, Derrick would find some other means of discovering whether the suspicion which had sprung up in his mind was well founded or not. He would go on board the *Ophir* on some pretext. Anyhow, he would not go back to the Hôtel de Noailles until he knew the name of the princess who was sailing on the *Ophir* to-morrow.

After waiting for about ten minutes he saw the steward coming towards him, and he drew out his portfolio and took out fifty francs. The steward came up and handed him a small piece of paper.

“Sorry to keep you so long, sir, but it took a bit of a time to go over the list. I wrote the name down for you on a piece

of paper, as it's foreign, and I might have forgot it."

"Very good of you. Thanks very much."

Derrick did not look at the name, but put the piece of paper into his pocket and handed the man the fifty francs.

"Thank you, sir."

"I wish you a good voyage," said Derrick.
"Good day!"

He was just about to go when an idea occurred to him, and he stopped.

"By the way, is this lady, the princess, travelling alone?"

"I couldn't say, sir. All I know is she's got a cabin to herself."

"Oh! Well, good-bye and good luck."

This time Derrick walked on and did not stop for any last words. But as soon as he had got away from the quay, and was in a broad dirty street, between the vast and dingy houses with shuttered windows which are characteristic of Marseilles, he paused and drew out the bit of paper which the steward had given him. On it was carefully written in round hand,
"PRINCESS ARANENSKY."

So it was she!

He thrust the bit of paper again into his pocket and walked slowly on. The street was thronged with people and traffic coming from and going to the quays, but he scarcely noticed the faces, or heard the voices, the rumbling of the wheels, the hooting of the horns of the motors. He was absorbed by the knowledge that this woman, whom he had meant to seek out in Montreux, was here with him in this city, was actually in Marseilles. Tomorrow she would be on her way to the Far East, would be travelling away from him, would perhaps be removed from his life for ever. But for the succeeding twenty-four hours she was near him, was possibly even in the same hotel with him. Of course, he had no positive knowledge that she was yet in Marseilles, but he did not doubt it. The *Ophir* had been expected to arrive before she had come into port, and many travellers were waiting in Marseilles to go away in her. Among those travellers was certainly the Princess. And Baroness Hausen? Was she there too? He wondered. And now as he walked he scrutinized the faces of the women who passed by in the open victorias of Mar-

seilles, in taxi-cabs and cars. At any moment the Princess might pass him. If she did, and it were at all possible, he intended to stop her. If he did see her, did stop her, he did not know how he would act, what he would say to her. But he would act as impulse directed him to act. And if he did not meet her in the crowded streets he would inquire for her at the various hotels. She must be in a hotel. And there were only three or four which she would choose to put up in, his own hotel, the Louvre et de la Paix, the Regina, the Grand Hotel—or perhaps La Réserve. There were a few bedrooms at the Réserve above the restaurant. It was very quiet and very sunny there. She might be there.

A few more steps brought Derrick in front of the Hôtel Regina. And he turned in to inquire if the Princess were there. After looking through the list the director said no; there was no one of that name in the hotel.

Derrick went on, passed the Turkish baths, and eventually came into the Cannebière.

He looked at his watch. It was close upon half-past twelve. Cockayne would be expecting him for *déjeuner*. He would inquire later

on at the other hotels, and if he did not find the Princess at any of them, he would drive out to the Réserve.

He found Cockayne in the hall, and they went at once into the restaurant to lunch.

An orchestra was playing and many people were sitting at the little tables. Derrick looked at everyone there slowly, deliberately, lest he should miss one.

"You seem interested in the crowd," said Cockayne. "Are you looking for anyone?"

"Yes." Derrick said.

"I didn't know you had friends in Marseilles."

"I find there is someone staying here whom I know, but it may not be in this hotel."

"Well, shall we lunch 'à prix fixe' or 'à la carte'?"

The Princess was not in the restaurant, and she did not come in during their lunch. When it was finished they went to have coffee in the hall.

Derrick had talked very little during lunch. He knew that Cockayne must have noticed his preoccupation. Cockayne was by nature a close observer, and Derrick's perturbation

of mind jumped to the eye. Derrick was quite aware of that. But the power of acting seemed to have been withdrawn from him. He no longer cared what his friend thought. Indeed, there were moments when he was strongly tempted without mentioning names to tell Cockayne the whole story, even up to the point of his finding out that the woman who had swindled him must be here in Marseilles, perhaps even in the hotel with them. But he had already described the Princess and Baroness Hausen to Cockayne. The latter would guess at once that the matter of the pearls was connected with the two women he had talked about, the two Russians. And if Cockayne did guess—what did that matter? Did Derrick owe it to such a woman as Princess Aranensky to be silent about her misdoings? If he did tell the story to Cockayne why should he conceal her name?

“What shall we do this afternoon?” said Cockayne.

“Well, I may have to go to the Réserve possibly,” Derrick answered.

His friend looked slightly surprised.

“But before then,” Derrick added, “I

must just look in at one or two of the principal hotels to inquire for someone."

"Then probably you'd rather be quite free for the afternoon."

"Perhaps it would be best. I may have to see someone."

After a moment he added :

"I say, Cockayne, you must think me an infernally tiresome fellow, giving myself airs of mystery. But the fact is I've discovered quite by chance this morning that in all probability the person who gave me the 'facer' I mentioned to you in Paris is here in Marseilles."

"That's an odd coincidence."

"Yes."

"And you want to find out where he is ?"

Derrick looked quickly at Cockayne, recognized his tact and looked away.

"Yes."

"Then I'll leave you quite free. And we'll meet at dinner-time, shall we ?"

"Perhaps that's best. I fear I'm a bad companion."

"My dear fellow, you're in trouble ! I don't know, and don't want to know, exactly

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what it is. That's not my affair. But wouldn't it be better to be quite drastic ? ”

“ What do you mean ? ”

“ Wouldn't it be better to cut the painter and let the boat go into the darkness ? ”

“ The boat ! But do you—— Of course you're speaking in metaphors. What a fool I am to-day ! One thing I can tell you. By to-morrow I'm sure Fate will have cut the painter. But I have something to do before then.”

“ Right ! I'll be here at seven and wait for you. Till then I'm non-existent.”

“ By seven I'll be here for certain.”

They parted, and Derrick went straight to the bureau, and asked whether a Princess Aranensky was staying in the hotel.

“ No, m'sieu,” said the hall-porter.

“ Are you quite certain ? ” said Derrick, and he repeated the name.

“ If you like I'll inquire, m'sieu, but I don't think the lady is staying here.”

He went away, and came back in three or four minutes.

“ No, m'sieu, the Princess is not staying here. You will find her at the Hôtel du Louvre

et de la Paix. It seems she telegraphed both here and to the Louvre for rooms from Switzerland. But she has gone to the Louvre."

"Thanks. Do you happen to know what day she arrived in Marseilles?"

"I couldn't say for certain, m'sieu. There are so many coming and going. But if you wish I can try to find out."

"No, no. It doesn't matter, thank you."

What did it matter what day the Princess had arrived in Marseilles? She was there. That was what mattered. He had only to cross the street, walk a few yards, and he would reach her hotel.

He put on his hat and went out.

It was just after two o'clock, not an orthodox hour for calling, but a very likely hour for finding a woman at home. Derrick went straight to the Hôtel du Louvre and asked at the bureau for Princess Aranensky.

"What name, sir?" said the man at the bureau.

Derrick hesitated. It had not occurred to him that, of course, he would have to send up his name before being admitted to see any guest in the vast hotel. Yet if he did send up

his name, surely the Princess would refuse to see him. Or would she refuse? She could not know why he was in Marseilles or what had happened in Paris. She could not know that he knew about the pearls. And even if she guessed that, or feared it, or was in complete uncertainty about it, she might have the courage to face him.

He had never actually tested her courage. Nevertheless, he believed in it instinctively. Even now that he knew of what she was capable he could not think of her as a possible coward.

Anyhow, if he wished to see her he must give his name.

"Mr. Derrick Merton," he said. "Is the Princess in?"

"I couldn't say, sir. If you will give me your card I will send up a boy."

Derrick pulled out his card-case. In doing this he noticed that his hand shook slightly. He tried to keep it steady as he gave the card to the man in the bureau.

"If you will sit down, m'sieu, I will have the card sent up at once."

Derrick found a seat in the hall, and

picked up a paper. He saw a boy in livery take his card, look at it, and go away with it towards the staircase of the hotel.

Suddenly he felt that this was one of the most intolerable moments of his life. A strange and ridiculous feeling of guilt took possession of him. He had been grossly injured, yet at the thought of perhaps confronting in a moment the woman who had inflicted the injury he was possessed by a sense as of shame. He dreaded the thought of meeting the Princess's eyes; he dreaded the thought of being shut up alone with her. And if he were not alone with her?

Probably she had not a sitting-room here in this hotel *de passage*. In that case they would have to meet, if they met, in public, in this hall perhaps, or in one of the rooms opening out of it. He looked round furtively and saw strangers everywhere, reading, smoking, or simply sitting and staring hard at everyone who came into or went out of the hall. Some of them were staring at him.

The boy was away for a very long time. But the hotel was large, with long corridors and many rooms. And servants, Derrick

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remembered, are seldom allowed the use of the lifts. The boy was bound to be a long time.

Having nothing to do, and being unable to fix his attention upon the paper he had taken up, Derrick looked at the people coming and going in the hall of the hotel, and wondered now and then vaguely about them ; wondered who and what they were, why they looked anxious or self-satisfied, what were their professions, where they lived, where they were going, how their lives were passed. All the time he was doing this he was secretly trying to combat his concealed agitation, to brace himself for the interview which perhaps lay before him. He had made no plan of conduct ; he was unable to make one now ; but he strove to pull himself together, to banish his absurd sense of shame. And at the same time he looked at the travellers and gave an edge of his mind to them.

But presently, just for one moment, his attention was riveted.

A man appeared in the hall. He was alone, and came, apparently, from the inner part of the hotel where the lift and the staircase were,

for Derrick first saw him standing very near the place where the boy had gone off with the card for the Princess.

This man was about thirty-eight, or perhaps forty years old, and looked wasted, not with ill-health but with thought. There was something almost terrifically mental about his appearance. Derrick thought of it as a glare of mind. But this glare of mind was strangely mingled with something else, something intensely physical and almost barbarous, which might either attract or repel, as the intensity of an animal may either attract or repel. The man was thin, large boned, gaunt and not much under six feet in height, with thick yellow-brown hair and a quite yellow beard and moustache. His face was pale, with a bony structure which was very apparent and marked cheek bones. His lips were large and the teeth large and very white and regular. Upon the bossy forehead there was the stamp of thought. It was the forehead of a deep and persistent thinker, of one who often drowned himself and sank down out of reach in thought. The eyes were yellow brown, exceptionally large, long in shape, and glitter-

ing with light, with energy, and with determination.

"A marvellously interesting man!" Derrick thought, as he looked at him. "And perhaps a marvellous brute too. A fierce mind in a fierce body!"

The man lifted a large thin hand, pulled at his yellow beard, then walked down the hall. He had seen an unoccupied writing-table. He went to it and sat down at it with his back towards Derrick. And just then the boy who had taken Derrick's card came back.

"Madame the Princess has gone out."

"You are sure?" said Derrick.

"She isn't there," said the boy.

He held out the card. Derrick took it, and went again to the bureau.

"I'll come back later on and see if I can find the Princess," he said to the man there. "Princess Aranensky."

"Bien, m'sieu!"

"She is leaving to-morrow, I understand."

"Madame la Princesse sails for India on the *Ophir* to-morrow."

"I'll call again this evening."

“ Bien, m’sieu ! ” said the man, with supreme indifference.

Derrick left the hotel.

All the afternoon he walked about Marseilles. He had a cup of tea in the Grand Café, smoked a cigar, and when darkness had fallen went once more to the Hôtel du Louvre.

He did not, of course, know whether the Princess had been in when he had called and had refused to see him, or whether she had really been out. He had no means of ascertaining that. But as he drew near to the hotel he debated with himself how he had better act this time. He might again send up his card and again be told that the Princess was out. In that case he could say he would wait in the hall till she returned. If she were in reality in her room upstairs that would be useless. What he wanted to do was to ascertain for certain whether she was in the hotel or was not in it. He realized for the first time what security there is in a large hotel for one who does not wish to be got at by someone from outside. The servants have a code of discretion. There is no means of forcing the doors.

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Or is there, if one has only a little self-possession—or call it impudence ?

It struck Derrick that he might get at the Princess in this way ; he might go into the hotel avoiding the bureau, go straight to the lift, give the lift attendant a big tip, and say, " Take me up to the sitting-room of the Princess Aranensky." The Princess might not have engaged a sitting-room. In that case the ruse would fail, for the attendant would certainly not take a stranger up to a lady's bedroom. But if by chance the Princess had a sitting-room it was quite possible that the man would pocket the tip and take Derrick up.

Derrick resolved to carry out this plan.

He found the hall of the hotel more crowded than ever. Travellers were arriving. Luggage was being unloaded. The bureau was bombarded by people asking questions and trying to engage rooms. The moment could not have been more favourable. Derrick made his way to the lift, which was luckily empty. A young man in the hotel livery stood beside it. Derrick got in.

" Kindly take me up to the Princess Aranensky's sitting-room," he said.

The man looked doubtful.

"Is Madame the Princess expecting monsieur?" he asked.

Derrick held out ten francs.

"Yes. The Princess is expecting me."

The young man, with a faint understanding smile, pocketed the bribe and the lift shot upward.

CHAPTER XIII

THE lift stopped at the second floor.

“What is Princess Aranensky’s number?” asked Derrick.

“The sitting-room is number 11B, m’sieu,” said the young man. “Go to the right. It is on the left at the end of the corridor.”

He stepped backwards into the lift and shut the ironwork gate.

Derrick walked slowly down the right-hand corridor till he was in front of the door which hid from him the Princess’s sitting-room. There he stopped.

It was rather dark in the corridor, and for the moment there was no one in it except himself. In the distance he heard a slight noise of voices talking in the “service” room near the stairs, and from another direction came the faint sound of a bath “running.” He lifted his hand and rapped on the door. There was no answer. And for a moment he felt a sensation of intense relief. Perhaps the room

was untenanted ; perhaps the Princess was out. He heard an electric bell, then the sound of a dress, and saw a housemaid hurrying down the corridor with her back to him. Immediately he knocked again at the door. This time a voice answered.

“ Entrez ! ” it said. “ Entrez ! ”

It was the Princess's voice. Derrick drew in his breath and opened the door.

He saw a rather large and banal room comfortably furnished, and with a door at one end leading into another room. This door was half open. Red curtains were drawn. The electric lights were turned on. A small fire was lit in the grate. About the room there were strewn cushions and books and magazines. There were also several vases full of roses and violets. A large red sofa was drawn up near the fire. Its gaudy colour was partially hidden by a piece of black and gold oriental embroidery worked with dull red and blue flowers. Upon this sofa, with a book in her hand, and her head on a dark-blue cushion, Princess Aransky was lying in a closely fitting black travelling dress.

When Derrick came in the book fell out of

her hand and dropped on the floor. For a moment she did not speak, nor did he. Then she pushed herself up on the sofa. A dull flush of red showed for an instant in her rather rough-hewn face and faded away.

“ You here in Marseilles ! ” she said.

He knew then that she had been out when he had called before and that she had not heard of his visit.

“ But how—— ” she added, and stopped.

She got up slowly.

“ But how did you know I was here ? How did you find my room ? ”

“ The lift-man brought me up and told me your number. ”

“ Yes ? ”

She waited, but Derrick said nothing more. Then she held out her hand. Mechanically he put his into it. At that moment it occurred to him that she could not know what he had done in Paris about the pearls, and, therefore, could not know that he had discovered her deception.

“ I wish to stay a little while, ” he said, with acute embarrassment.

“ Of course ! But wait a moment ! ”

She went to the door at the end of the room and passed into a further room, no doubt her bedroom. Meanwhile Derrick stood on the hearth and listened to the noise of the traffic in the Cannebière. His eyes fell on the book the Princess had dropped, and he bent down and picked it up. It was Steiner's "An Outline of Theosophy."

He laid it down carefully on a table beside a vase of roses.

In about five minutes the Princess came back and shut the door behind her.

"I thought you had gone to London," she said, coming up to him.

"And you meant to leave Europe for India without letting me know that you were going!"

"India! You know that——"

"I know that you intend to sail on the *Ophir* to-morrow."

"Yes; that's true."

"Wouldn't it have been—what shall I say—kinder to tell me that before I left Montreux?" he said, with bitterness.

Now that he was with the Princess, now that he had just touched her and was close to her,

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looking at her, feeling her atmosphere, now that he was standing among the books and cushions and flowers which she carried about with her, or bought wherever she was, a horrible jealousy and almost hatred of her had suddenly come to him. It was terrible to care for a woman who swindled you, then got rid of you, and, finally, with your money, purchased the means of escaping out of your life without giving you any hint of her intention. It was humiliating, it was intolerable, still to have any feeling for such a woman. Derrick wanted to look upon the Princess as a low creature, a disgraceful adventuress, a woman only fit to be thrown to the police. But he couldn't. Everything in her and about her forbade that. And it was the struggle between his appreciation of her infamy and his appreciation of her intense and painful attraction for him which caused him to feel so bitter. He was rent, and hated himself, and her for having turned him into this tragic enigma of a man, this thing that could feel fiercely but was unable to understand itself. And he was abominably jealous of the woman, the flesh and blood human being, who was slipping

away from him into the shining mystery of the East, drawn by influences which he knew nothing of, which she meant that he should never know anything of.

"Yes, perhaps it would," she answered. "I don't know. There are ways of kindness that are easy but cruel in the end. I made up my mind that it was better to go as I intended to go."

"That is without ever seeing me again!"

"Yes."

She had not asked him to sit down, but now, perhaps seeing in his eyes the determination of violent feeling, she sat down and, with the air of almost brooding fatalism which he had noticed once or twice at Montreux, said:

"Since you are here and have found me—how I don't know and cannot divine—stay for a little while. We have been much together in the snows. It was ordained that we were to be together again here on the edge of my journey. Nothing foretold this to me. But it had to be."

He sat down.

"Why did you come here?" she asked.

She stretched out her hand. He now saw

a bag lying on a table near her. She took it, opened it, drew out a case. Things repeated themselves horribly. He remembered the first time he had seen her at Montreux. Now here she lit a cigarette at the match he held.

"I was on my way to Cap Martin with a friend. I couldn't make up my mind to go to London in winter. I—I thought London could very well wait!"

As he was vaguely trying to give her a wrong impression he did not look at her while he said this.

"And you saw me in the street?"

He felt that her eyes were fixed on him with intensity.

"No."

He told her exactly what had happened, how he had gone to look at the *Ophir* and the episode of the steward.

"And what led you to the *Ophir*?" she asked.

"I believe it was what you once said to me about your desire to go to India. If not, it was mere chance!"

"It certainly was not mere chance. Then you were not going back to Montreux?"

"Yes, I should have gone. I came here to go to Cap Martin, but while I was here I decided to go back to Montreux. Of course, that was before I knew you were here."

She was silent, and sat quite still.

"Is Baroness Hausen with you?" he asked

"Katya—no."

"You are going to India alone?"

"Marguerite will accompany me. You remember—she always made tea for us."

"Marguerite—yes, I remember."

She had spoken as if it were a very long time ago. And now he felt that indeed it was long ago—the short period of their intimate friendship. A sickness of the heart came upon him, a sort of nausea of the affections.

"Is Baroness Hausen still in Montreux?" he asked dully.

"I left her there."

Again a silence fell between them. Derrick was trying to force himself into frankness. He had come there to tell the Princess that he had discovered her fraud. And now he was talking vaguely about India, and asking useless questions about Baroness Hausen.

At this moment the bedroom door opened and Marguerite appeared carrying a tray with tea things. She greeted Derrick with a smile, and was evidently not at all surprised to see him.

“Put the tea here, Marguerite!” said the Princess, indicating a table close to where she was sitting.

“Please don’t have it for me,” said Derrick.

“I take it myself at this hour.”

“Oh, then—but really I don’t want it.”

He felt at that moment that if he had tea once again with this extraordinary woman he might falter in his resolution to “have it out” with her about the pearls. Although he knew that his money would pay for these rooms, this meal, the cabin on the *Ophir*, all the expenses of the journey and perhaps the long residence in India, the preposterous idea was in his mind that he could not break bread with this woman and then attack her, that to do that would be disgraceful on his part. He knew she was moral riff-raff—her own expression—but somehow he could not feel that she was. He even presently began to wonder vaguely again whether it were possible that

she herself had been deceived about the pearls, whether she could possibly have supposed that they were genuine. For now that he was with her once more it seemed incredible that she could be a subtle swindler. There was no atmosphere of an adventuress about her. She now seemed quite at her ease. There was nothing abashed in her face or manner, nothing furtive or sly in her demeanour.

Could she have not known? If only that were so! But how could it possibly be?

Marguerite went away and returned with the teapot and toast. Then she smiled again at Derrick and disappeared, shutting the door behind her.

"Now won't you have some tea?" said the Princess.

"No, thank you. I don't want it."

She looked at him, and there was a very definite question in her eyes.

"You are angry with me? That is why you won't share this little meal with me?"

"Yes; that's it."

She said nothing, and poured out some tea for herself.

"Do you mean to tell me that you are

surprised at that ? Do you deny that I have the right to feel angry with you ? Haven't you been false to our friendship ? Haven't you trampled on it ? ”

“ You mean—by intending to go away without letting you know ? ”

“ I suppose we English have different notions about friendship from those held by Russians. I considered we were friends. You called me friend. You signed yourself ‘ Your friend ’ to me. Baroness Hausen told me that you valued my friendship, even that you had ideals about the friendship of a woman and a man.”

“ I did not give Katya the right to say anything about that.”

“ Then do you mean that you never felt any friendship at all for me ? Is that it ? ”

“ I enjoyed our talks, our expeditions in the snows. Much that you said interested me. There was much in your character which I admired.”

“ But you never at any time, even at the beginning, felt any real friendship for me ? ”

She looked at him with eyes which seemed to him to be full of brooding mystery.

“ In the vastness of our many lives what is such a brief connexion as ours has been, yours and mine ? ” she answered. “ We meet. We pass a few weeks—weeks only—together. We separate, probably for ever. To-morrow I shall be on my way to India. Is it of any use to try to analyse such a relation as ours ? It was designed as everything is designed. It had to be. And now it has to come to an end.”

“ You have plenty of brains,” said Derrick. “ But you have no heart at all. You are one of the most deceiving characters I have ever met with. You suggest warmth, and you are as cold as ice. You suggest sympathy, and you don’t know what sympathy means. I always felt at Montreux that you and Baroness Hausen were at the opposite Poles. But it wasn’t so. I understand now why you were friends, why you were able to be together. You were linked by character. There was the tie of a mutual frigidity between you. No wonder you were able to live among the snows and the ice. Such conditions suited you both. You will be an alien among the fires of India—if you go there.”

"You make a mistake. I belong rather to Asia than to Europe, like many Russians."

After a moment of silence Derrick said :

"You have achieved something like a miracle."

"What miracle ?"

"You have made me respect the Baroness. She, at any rate, shows herself as she is. She doesn't pretend friendship. She doesn't pretend anything. She is made of stone, and she lets you see the stone, touch it, know it for what it is. You expect nothing from her."

He got up mechanically and went towards the red curtains which hid the windows ; then he turned and came back to the hearth. This woman was making him feel the uselessness of everything, the smallness, futility, momentariness of everything, in an almost paralysing way. Friendship, love even, anger, the sense of outrage, the desire for revenge—they seemed inevitably to wilt, to wither under the action of her peculiar mind and temperament on this winter afternoon. And yet—and that was the Devil of it—her attraction for him remained, and had never been more great in its influence upon him.

As he stood still there, with the little fire behind him, a cold jealousy possessed him, with which his ignorance was horribly linked. He had the feeling that there was something which, known by him, would explain, make clear, this woman to him. And he was jealous of this mystery, almost as if it were a living being.

"I have never understood you," he said bitterly. "And I never shall understand you."

He made an almost violent movement under the influence of acute feeling.

"You are going!" the Princess said.

He stopped.

"Going! Do you wish me to go?"

He looked down at her.

"I don't believe you care whether I go or stay. I suppose I have no meaning for you—have never had any meaning for you. And yet you were resolved to know me at Montreux. Why was that? Why was it?"

After a moment she said:

"Directly I saw you I felt we were destined to know each other."

"Destined! It was your will power which

drew me towards you. Do you deny that ? Do you deny that human beings have will and exercise it freely ? ”

“ The Arabs say that the outline of our lives is imposed upon us but that we can colour them as we will. Perhaps that is the truth.”

“ And how have you led me to colour my life ? ”

“ You are as free as I am.”

“ Ah ! ”

He bent towards her.

“ Perhaps I could force you to feel that I have some power over you,” he said.

She sat silent with her eyes fixed upon him.

“ I have the power to prevent you from sailing to India to-morrow,” he said.

“ I don’t think so.”

“ I have ! ” he asserted, almost with violence.

He stared at her. He wished to tell her the nature of the power he had asserted he possessed, to tell her that he could lodge a complaint against her, charge her with being a swindler, have her arrested. The *Ophir* would

sail without her if he took action in time. But could he take action ? As he looked down at this woman the terrible influence of personality came upon him, that psychic mystery which works like a thing underground in the dark, and which can sap the foundations of life ; he felt it like something as definite as wood or iron, although it was as unsubstantial as mist.

“ I have ! ” he had said. But was it true ? Has a man power if he is unable to exercise it ? Is not the exercise of the power the only positive proof of its possession ? As Derrick gazed at the Princess, something in her calm and steady expression, even in her attitude, in the shape of her body, in the forms of her delicate hands, in the way the thick black hair grew and was folded about her head, told him that he would never denounce her to the police of Marseilles or of any other city, that he would never give away the secret which he had found out in Paris. Could he even tell it to her before he left her for ever ?

“ Well ? ” she said at last, as he did not speak.

"When I was in Paris——" he began.

"Yes?" she said.

"It's no use!" he muttered.

A cry, ridiculous and tragic, rose up in his heart at that moment—"Why have I the feelings within me, the traditions behind me, of a gentleman?"

With a desperate effort to get the better of those feelings and those traditions he said:

"Don't you know what happened in Paris?"

"No," she said in a calm voice.

He stood for a moment in silence looking down, not at her now but at the dull red hotel carpet, which was complicated with drab and blue flowers. During that moment he was trying to force himself to speak about the pearls, to attack her for having so basely swindled him.

"She *shall* know what I found out in Paris," he said to himself. "I *will* tell her."

But his lips obstinately refused to speak. Within him a voice, persistent and final, said:

"You wished to marry this woman. You must let her alone."

At last he looked at her again. He read nothing in her eyes but a deep and sombre fatalism. What she read in his he did not know. Finally, he turned and went out of the room without another word, shutting the door behind him.

CHAPTER XIV

HE went back to the hotel, dined with Cockayne, to whom he told nothing, and then, with the excuse that he was tired, went up to his bedroom and shut himself in.

He told himself that he had seen the Princess for the last time, that she had vanquished him and that he had done with her. But in the night a strange and cold and very intense curiosity took possession of him and kept him for a long time awake. He felt that the heart of the mystery of this woman had escaped his investigation, that he knew nothing of it, absolutely nothing, that he had never drawn near to it, but that if he could look into it perhaps everything would be clear to him.

Even now was it too late to know something of the truth ?

Perhaps—the next morning.

The morning came and with it decision. He sent a message to Cockayne to say that he would be in to lunch but was engaged till then.

Afterwards he dressed, breakfasted, and by ten was down at the wharf from which the *Ophir* was to sail that morning for India.

There was a great bustle at the wharf. Seafaring men were coming and going. Knots of nondescript people were standing near the sheds talking in many languages. Cabs were driving up full of travellers and hand baggage. Derrick was jostled by passers-by, and stared at by lounging men, and by boys with hungry, knowing eyes and dirty hands that looked greedy. One ruffian approached him and said in very bad French :

“Can I do anything for you, monsieur ? Are you looking for anyone ? The ‘Duc d’Aumale’——”

Derrick moved abruptly away. The man with a scowl looked after him.

At half-past ten a large omnibus loaded with luggage rumbled heavily over the cobble stones. A placard fixed on it announced that it was from the Hôtel du Louvre est de la Paix. Standing behind a pile of dirty sacks, Derrick watched the descent of the people in the omnibus. Among them was Marguerite. She stood for some time on the quay quite near

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him, but did not see him. She was surrounded by trunks and vociferating porters. Finally, attended by a man in uniform from the hotel, she disappeared under the shed roof in the direction of the *Ophir*, grasping in one hand a large case, which looked like a jewel-case, and in the other some strapped-together umbrellas and sticks.

Was the Princess's pointed stick among them, the stick on which she had so often leaned as she and Derrick had stood together in the snows?

Eleven o'clock was striking from the churches of Marseilles when Derrick saw in the distance a victoria drawn by a big brown horse coming along the quay towards him. It pulled up not far from him in front of the place where the *Ophir* was berthed. As the horse faced him, and the driver on the box was a broad heavy man, Derrick could not see who was inside the carriage. Directly it stopped, a tall, thin and large-boned man got out with a sort of almost awkward litheness. For a moment his face was turned full towards Derrick, a face framed in thick yellow-brown and yellow hair, pale, with a bossy forehead,

prominent cheek bones, large lips and large white teeth—the man Derrick had noticed on the previous day in the hall of the Hôtel du Louvre. For an instant only the man's eyes travelled along the crowded quay with a glance that seemed at the same time piercing and indifferent, and to Derrick it was as if a glare of mind was just then turned on the stones, the sheds, the vehicles and the people, like a search-light, fierce, implacable and disturbing. Then the man swung round. Derrick knew why. He knew who was going to get out of the carriage, who was the man's companion, who was going with him on the *Ophir* to India. The man held out a big hand. Another hand took it. Princess Aranensky got down. For a moment they stood together on the quay. The man paid the driver, took the Princess familiarly by the arm, and seemed to draw her powerfully, but calmly, towards the great ship.

The crowd swallowed them up.

Derrick stood quite still by the pile of dirty sacks. Should he follow them? Should he accost them? Should he even now try to do something to prevent the Princess from leaving France with his money, and with this man,

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for whose sake probably, almost certainly, she had done what she had done ?

“ Can I do anything for you, monsieur ? Are you—— ”

It was the lounging ruffian again.

“ Damn you ! Let me alone, will you ? ”

Derrick had turned upon him ferociously. The man slunk away. And then Derrick went off in the opposite direction without another glance towards the *Ophir*, which in an hour would be carrying her burden to Asia. He turned to the left presently and came to the harbour, where the conjurers and acrobats were performing in the midst of the watching crowds. There he drew out his watch and looked at it. Twenty past eleven ! He had forty minutes to do what he had just thought of doing. Time enough ! He went on, walking fast.

Between twelve and half-past, from a point on the sea front high above the sea, he saw the *Ophir*, pouring black smoke from her enormous funnels, drawing out of the harbour into the open waters of the Gulf of Lyons. He watched her steady progress with a sort of dull, and yet staring, interest. She was carrying away with

her an unexplained mystery which had injured his life. She faded presently upon the horizon into greyness and a suggestion of mist.

When he was back again in the hotel he went up to his bedroom, took the pearls from their case, spread them out mechanically on a table, sat down and stared at them for a long time. Presently there was a knock on the door and a voice called out :

"Merton ! Are you there ? "

"Come in ! " Derrick answered.

Cockayne showed himself.

"I lunched long ago. Aren't you——"

He saw the pearls and was silent.

"What do you think of these ? " said Derrick.

Cockayne came up to the table, bent down and picked up the pearls.

"They look remarkably fine," he said, after a moment's consideration.

"Yes, don't they ? But they're false."

Cockayne put down the pearls.

"They make marvellous imitations nowadays," he said. "It's easy to be taken in."

"Yes, isn't it ? When I get back to

London I think I shall give them to a flapper."

Cockayne looked hard at him.

"I don't think you will," he said.

Derrick left the case open on the table, threw the pearls carelessly into his dispatch box, shut it, and said :

"Now I'll do anything you like !"



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